Memory Palace

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Memory Palace

by stranded_labyrinth

Summary

Hannibal was plenty used to taking care of Will during bouts of memory loss. Typically, however, it had been Hannibal who induced them to begin with.

When Will loses his memory after a hunt gone awry in Florence, Hannibal struggles to cope with being back at square one. As Will finds himself lost in this palace of memories they reside in, he slowly begins to discover that there are things about his past that Hannibal has chosen to conceal, for better or for worse.

What horrible things had Will done before they came here?

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

> this chapter is definitely going to be longer than any chapter after it, since I needed to establish where everyone was in the fic's timeline.
>
> hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was so odd how, despite everything, Hannibal's primary love language to anyone and everyone around him was acts of service.

Will often wondered what sort of experience that was for Hannibal, considering himself so above the ordinary man and yet bending over backwards to please whatever guest was in his presence. Will did ask about it once, and the only answer he received was something about it not being necessary to be cruel to a cow that's already on its way to the butcher. He couldn't help but laugh.

This situation was a bit different. Hannibal had always held Will in such a different regard to others. One would think that this, perhaps, made Hannibal insistent on Will's capabilities as his own person, and yet the actual result was that Will often found himself pampered to the highest degree possible.

The evening sky had been clear earlier, enough to cause Will to peer over the balcony for what would almost become an hour, before Hannibal had come over to pull him gently from his thoughts and remind him that he did, in fact, promise to go to Hannibal's presentation that evening on Dante.

Will glanced over the balcony one final time. Florencian nights were always so gorgeous.

Granted, most of Will's evening was then spent with his jaw clenched, trying not to show the sheer amount of sensory overload he was in from the man in his 60s coughing up a lung beside him. Hannibal, being used to having Will's full attention and very much *not*

appreciating anything taking that away, had decided after the presentation to offer the man some not-so-subtle advice for chronic coughs.

The rest of their time there was spent with Will practically being able to *feel* the aura of discontent radiating off of Hannibal every time he had tried to guide Will into a quieter room to recalibrate his hearing, only to be interrupted by someone coming to make polite commentary on the presentation. Will thought Hannibal was going to break their cover on the spot when someone glanced at Will, then looked back at Hannibal to ask, "What's wrong with him?"

Hannibal forced a smile, though Will could feel his hands tighten around him.

"Nothing. Nothing at all."

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Back in Wolf Trap, Will was used to having to grit his teeth through showers that, at most, were probably lukewarm. He never got steaming water until he got to stay at a motel, and he had always taken that as the biggest blessing there was during especially horrible cases. Picturing Will in such a predicament had left a look of complete disapproval on Hannibal's face. Will's baths in Florence were always steaming.

Hannibal sat behind him, slowly and diligently working with Will's hair. It had always been curly, but unkempt. He wasn't the sort of guy to focus too hard on a proper hair routine, but leave it to the 19-year-old girl they brought with them to Florence to damn near scold Will for his poor hair care, within earshot of Hannibal, whom Abigail most certainly knew would immediately go out of his way to buy products specifically for curly hair.

As with much of Will's new life, he now couldn't even fathom how he had ever done anything different. Hannibal made sure of that in every capacity. Everything Will received here in Florence was something he would have blown off as a complete luxury at home, not even worth looking at unless he wanted to particularly revel in just how little the FBI paid him.

But here, he sat still in the tub, the only movements in the room being intertwined with the sound of Hannibal's hands scrunching mousse through Will's hair that probably cost more than Will's old car did.

"You have to scrunch into the roots ," Abigail had told them, reciting a video she had seen online. " *That's what gets the entire hair strand, and gives it volume."*

"Only the best for you ," Hannibal had said to an indignant Will who just spotted all the bottles lined up in the bathroom. Will hadn't yet accepted back then that he was, in fact, something Hannibal was willing to be generous towards.

It had been quite a beautiful evening, seeing the sunset, attending Hannibal's Dante lecture despite the man beside him sounding like he was seconds from death, seeing the stars, taking a hot bath, and Hannibal ensuring that every strand of Will's hair was gleaming with a healthy shine in a perfectly defined curl. Longer than it used to be, but the much more defined curl pattern pulled the strands high enough to where not many would even notice it had grown. Except for Hannibal, who smiled to himself as he gently tugged the strands, revealing their full length only to himself.

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"Hann, you spent how long on those just to pull them out again?"

Will didn't get much of a response. Hannibal lay beside him, continuing to gently tug at individual locks of Will's hair, causing them to frizz slightly.

This sort of thing was a nightly occurrence. It was almost as if they couldn't go too long of a period of time without some kind of loving touch, otherwise Will would, what, fly back to Wolf Trap?

Will reached up, gently taking Hannibal's wrist, and pushing his hand away.

"I would *really* love to not look like you didn't do my hair at all if someone sees me tomorrow."

Normally, Hannibal would just smile, go about whatever it was he was doing, and that would be the end of it. But something about the nights they'd spent here always left him feeling a bit more fantastical about their situation, relishing in what he had always wanted but never got to have before.

"My apologies," Hannibal finally replied. "I find I often cannot stop myself from taking you in."

Will rolled onto his side, fully facing him. "That so?"

"Truthfully, I wonder almost daily how you have managed to spend your life so humbly. If I had so much as half of your beauty, I would quickly become the modern Narcissus, ceaselessly gazing at my reflection. Instead, I ceaselessly gaze at you. When I pictured this life for us, I never knew how much I would continue to ache for you at any given moment. Whether we are apart or right here together, I yearn all the same."

Will smiled at him, and then:

"Wow…Du Maurier was right, you *are* obsessed with me."

The look on Hannibal's face was enough to send Will into a fit of laughter, laying on his back, unable to look at Hannibal's offended expression without laughing harder.

"...How dare you? I was saying something so beautiful, and you do this to me? How could you?"

That didn't exactly help Will catch his breath. Though really, Hannibal was simply teasing as he watched, taking in the sight of Will in sheer joy. Will had hardly ever laughed back in the States, had he? The only time Hannibal could recall a true, genuine laugh from Will was during their second ever meeting, their first time alone together, when Hannibal had suggested that Jack Crawford considered Will a fine china tea cup, only to be brought out for special occasions. It was then that he had decided that the first chance he got, he needed to have Will produce that sound again. And here the melody was, in his beautiful amusement.

It was the loveliest sound Hannibal had ever heard.

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Hannibal wasn't necessarily one to struggle with falling asleep. Rather, he stayed awake intentionally that night, gazing at Will, who was sound asleep beside him.

Perhaps this was so captivating because Will was used to a god awful mattress back in Wolf Trap, something cheap that was difficult to get good sleep on. Hannibal was a firm believer that anything you spend a third of your lifetime on requires splurging, though he refused to judge Will for decisions made while on a budget he couldn't control. On top of that, nightmares would come crashing in endlessly, overtaking any sense of peace Will temporarily held onto. It was…disturbing, Hannibal would call it, though really the word he wanted to attribute to it was "saddening".

It was almost hard to believe all of the issues Will had with sleep before they came here. Here, Will took all of ten seconds to fall asleep if he put his mind to it.

That didn't mean they couldn't have entertaining moments there. For instance, that night, Hannibal adjusted his position in bed, rolling onto his other side to finally get some rest. Will, asleep yet sensing the sudden absence, furrowed his brows and patted around the bed in front of him until he found Hannibal again, then pulled the two of them together.

Hannibal would have laughed if he didn't think it would wake Will. Here they were, after Hannibal had fought tooth and nail to get them here, literally slaughtering people and always

seeming to be the protector of the two…and Will had, in his sleep, forced him to be a little spoon.

Hannibal rolled over, gently nestling his head into Will's chest, accepting the new position. Allowing someone to grant him such comfort had never come so easily in his life. He would be a fool to not accept this blessing.

It was far more often like this than Hannibal had ever initially imagined. He was never sure how to picture Will actually allowing himself to be affectionate with him. He knew how he himself would want to be, but in all honesty, he wasn't entirely sure. He had never exactly had someone to be so intimate with before in the genuine sense. He knew what people were *supposed* to do, and he could mimic that, but the rest had to be slowly figured out. The result was being completely caught off guard by just how *gentle* his lover was.

Perhaps it was an empathy thing. Perhaps Will was engaging with the "treat others the way you want to be treated" mentality. Was it a message to Hannibal to reciprocate his exact actions? Or was Will so well-versed in taking in strays that he went about this the same way, taking in some poor, battered dog off the street and giving it as much love as he could?

Because the poor thing missed out on that, and deserved love.

Dogs are known to love unconditionally. Perhaps, if the analogy rings true, Will is looking for your unconditional love, just as he gives you his own.

Oh, good God (should there be one at all), does he give you his own.

Hannibal closed his eyes.

Perhaps he was content with being synonymous with a stray dog. Will had constantly surrounded himself with such creatures, which would count it as a position of high honor in his life.

With a man as empathetic as Will, it couldn't possibly be a bad thing.

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There were certain things about bringing Will into a more aristocratic lifestyle that Hannibal had to quickly get used to, even if others wouldn't.

One of the first instances of this came with a suit-fitting, for a personally tailored suit that Hannibal had ordered for him. A medium-dark neutral color, something he knew Will would like. Or something he *thought* Will would like. Will's negative reaction wasn't about the color, certainly. Will's reaction came when he touched the fabric for the first time.

Despite what he may have thought, Will couldn't spend his entire time in Florence masking his autism. He learned that the hard way when he found himself jerking his hand away from the fabric, cringing, then aggressively rubbing the offending hand on the fabric of his shirt.

The tailor, Giovanni, gave him a concerned look. "It is not to your liking, signore?"

"The fabric's horrible–" Will found himself saying through gritted teeth, before realizing that he should probably find a more polite reply. "The fabric…doesn't feel good…Sorry."

Giovanni simply smiled. "We are not too long into working on it. I can find you a more suitable fabric, signore."

Will nodded, giving a little polite smile. "Thank you…"

Giovanni nodded, reaching into a briefcase he had thankfully brought with him. "I do have plenty of samples, signore. Feel free to take your pick!"

Hannibal watched the two, satisfied, as Will sifted through the different materials to find one that wouldn't be a complete sensory nightmare for him. Fortunately enough, one of the swatches was simple tweed, which Will found he much preferred to the horrid cashmere he had just touched. Cashmere was like some satin rip-off, as if somebody tried to make silk, but felt the need to give it a few dips in a vat of acid to get rid of everything nice about it.

When Giovanni left, notes in hand, Hannibal turned to Will.

"Are you satisfied with the new results?"

"Well, we'll see when he's done. He was nice, though. I was shocked he wasn't weirded out by my, uh…"

"He would not dare. His brother is autistic as well, therefore he is very accommodating."

"Oh. That would explain it."

Will thought the conversation was over, but noticed Hannibal continuing to stand there, head tilted slightly, eyes eagerly awaiting some kind of response. Finally, it clicked, and Will gave a soft laugh.

"Yes, I liked the color you picked."

Hannibal smiled.

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Will found it…highly difficult to drop his American habits in Florence.

By now, it seemed people knew that Hannibal had an almost disgustingly American husband, though the decent folks didn't seem to mind all that much. Will had brought his southern manners with him, and though there were definitely some culture shocks, folks were just glad that he wasn't behaving like a typical tourist.

"It is incredible where a little bit of effort will get you," Hannibal said to him one day. "They know you're trying, and they appreciate you for it."

Will gave an awkward smile in response. He wasn't sure how to comprehend people acknowledging him being different from them without berating him for it in some way if they had no use for it. That's the way it had been back home for just about his entire life. Even so, he couldn't help but feel slightly homesick some days, living somewhere so different to where he'd spent his whole life prior.

He made the mistake of telling Abigail this one day. Of course, word got back to Hannibal.

Will had entered the kitchen to a horrible sight.

"That's not the right sauce."

"Is it not? The bottle says–"

"Yeah, that's for after. You don't add it now."

There was Hannibal with Abigail, the two bickering about how to properly make barbecued meat on the stove.

It would have been endearing were they not both horrendously wrong.

Will took over from there, proving his cooking skills had greatly improved since living with Hannibal.

At least, until he burned himself. Then he was banished from the stove, only allowed to give instruction from the side.

Nonetheless, Will and Abigail thoroughly enjoyed their dinner that night. Hannibal… remained polite.

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"I can't believe we've damned ourselves so deeply."

"How bad do you think he'd freak out if we made a suicide pact?"

"I'm willing to become a tragic story if you are."

"Aren't we already?"

"You two are *unbearably* dramatic," piped up Hannibal at last from the stove he was cleaning. "It is dishwashing, not rocket science."

He tried not to allow himself to look amused when he heard his two dishwashers giggling. He failed.

Abigail finished the set of dishes she had split with Will, and went off to her room to finish listening to a university lecture she had missed. As she went, Will asked a question that he had no idea would take the peace they just had and brutally tear it apart.

“I suppose I forgot to ask, Hannibal– Who did we have for dinner tonight?”

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No earbuds on this Earth were built to block out the sound of an angry Will.

He wasn't angry *often* , certainly. Typically it was quiet anger. Uncomfortable anger. The kind where he would go down the street and pettily grab fast food instead of eating whatever Hannibal cooked that night because he was so sure that saying anything was going to open a can of worms he didn’t have the energy to try and close, and yet he was too irritated to deal with him altogether.

It was a leftover from their past, proof of their relationship not being perfect after all; Will could never feel entirely sure that he was going to be listened to when expressing how upset he was with anything Hannibal did or said. As an unfortunate result (that Hannibal *was* trying to work on, to his credit), Will often bottled up copious amounts of frustration until it exploded.

Before Hannibal, Will had developed an odd habit throughout his adult life of giving gifts when he was angry. Gifts were better to bear than teeth, and often led to a less bloody outcome. Initially, Hannibal hadn’t picked up on the notion, and was slightly disappointed to find Will shilling out money on trivial things for him, when truly it was meant to be the other way around. It wasn’t until Abigail began to point out Will’s overall demeanor during these interactions that the gift giving itself left Hannibal’s head, and he was forced to reckon with what it might actually mean.

Hannibal had to put an end to the ordeal once and for all when Will had bought him a new motorcycle, after not having spoken at all about his emotions (which he would usually openly discuss) for a solid week, leaving Hannibal to realize Will had been silently fuming the entire time. And now, without the gift-giving to serve as a replacement for signs of anger, the anger made itself known, manifesting in furrowed brows and clenched jaws and turning away with sarcastic laughs, until finally it would grow tired of the constant pressure and bubble up,

fizzing over the top and leaving Hannibal to clean up the resulting mess, with Will feeling horrible for allowing it to bubble over to begin with. Remorse was a funny thing like that.

Granted, that wasn't to say that Hannibal was somehow without his own frustrations, he was just eerily calm about his. Even if it bubbled over, it would be a cold day in hell before he would use that as an excuse to lash out at Will.

Besides, Abigail was typically able to get them to resolve conflict without the use of harsh words…or knives. She would never in her life forget the time she brought helium balloons into the equation, and left the two most serious men she had ever met in her life unable to do anything but laugh at each other from different sides of the room until Will was on the floor in tears. Then there was the time that she foolishly brought pillows into the equation when she saw things *really* heating up, having forgotten that one of them was raised so aristocratically that he had never in his life had a pillow fight, leaving the poor man to get his face rearranged on sight by an angry Will armed with an embroidered weapon. Fun times.

This was not one of those fun times.

"Elise Bianchi? Are you fucking *serious* Hannibal?"

"Will, if you would just–"

"No! This was *careless* !"

"This was *opportunity* ."

"She was *nice* !"

Hannibal took a breath. "She was *tasteless.* " He took a moment to acknowledge the poor choice of words, then continued, "She was far more bluntly impolite to others than she was toward you. Horrifically insulting to just about anybody she did not fully approve of. You were merely lucky enough to not have to witness it for yourself."

"Oh, so now I'm too *blind* to see whatever perceived slight you detect? Only Hannibal Lecter, final judge of *manners* , gets to see!"

"Will, that is not at *all* what I–"

"First I need to fix my *unsightly* American manners in order to make *any* friends–"

"I *never* said that."

"You might as well have! Then, who cares who you *do* become friends with here, *dear Will*, they're being served for *family dinner!*"

“ *Will* , please–”

“But oh, to hell with killing Rocco, who went on a rant about how *mentally deficient* you are because you took too long trying to–”

“ *What did you just say?* ”

From her room, Abigail felt her chest tense, and she imagined Will’s was probably tenser. There was a dead silence through the entire building.

“...Did you not think to bring this up to me?”

Despite keeping his overall composure, Hannibal’s voice was dripping venom.

This was a more common problem than either of them had ever considered. Will, because he was so used to it in his day to day life that he never expected anyone to be so furious at his treatment by others, and Hannibal, because he had spent so long loving Will's mind while thinking that others simply didn't understand it that he hadn't really considered genuine *hatred* from people. It was an infuriating concept.

Any time Will didn't make eye contact, or fumbled his words, or moved in a different way than people expected, or did just about anything including *exist* , someone would either say something or make a face or indicate in some other way that they were disturbed, annoyed, or whatever other emotion signified a general distaste. Regardless, they would treat him differently. As in different than the way one would treat an adult human. It made Hannibal want to wring their necks until he felt nothing but bone, all while saying *"Don't you understand? He is so much more capable than you could ever be."*

Will's mind was what drove Hannibal toward him, drove both of them toward each other, and defined every aspect of what they have now. To insult that is one of the highest offenses in the presence of Hannibal Lecter. An instantaneous death wish. Beyond rude, beyond discourteous, it was *disgusting* .

If Abigail was being honest with herself, this Rocco guy was a serious dick, but she fully understood where Will was coming from. The last time Will asked Hannibal what an Italian insult translated to, Hannibal had sutured the offending man's mouth shut so he could never speak again, then made the death as slow as he could, the man no longer able to scream.

"What did he do?" Abigail had asked.

"Mocked my mind, apparently ," Will had replied. Abigail remembered hissing between her teeth, grimacing. She knew exactly what comment he had made to Will, and knew that his death wasn't exactly painless.

In the other room, it took a bit for Will to be able to respond, trying to gather the proper words. Hannibal was terrifyingly patient.

"...I…wasn't sure how you'd react…" Will got out at last. "You're sloppier when you're angry. I didn't want you to get pissed off and get yourself caught."

“You think I cannot control myself?”

“Not when you’re especially protective, no.”

There was no arguing with that. There really wasn’t. Hannibal seemed to consider this, which was fantastic, because it was a fact.

Finally, he let out a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding, his demeanor shifting.

“...I had thought he merely annoyed you. I apologize for the assumption. As of tonight, consider his life a debt to be paid to you.”

That was the kicker here. In order for those two to get along for more than half an hour, Hannibal had to learn the most horrific trade of all... *accountability* . It was a demand of Will's before he could fully accept settling down with him. Hannibal was obligated to accept when his actions harmed Will, or the gold bands they wore around their ring fingers would serve no other purpose than a façade. Will had never seen Hannibal cringe before, but he came close to it when Will had revealed this thought process to him. Nothing stung quite as harshly as the concept of those rings being nothing more than props for an act. It was a painful idea that Hannibal was willing to do just about anything to dispel.

Abigail, hearing them from her room, smiled. Despite the current situation, it was nice to hear them actually talk about how the things the other one did or said made them feel. “ *Progress* ,” Hannibal kept calling it, despite still being horrible at it.

Will nodded, adjusting his position uncomfortably and looking at the freshly washed dinner plates. “A *debt* …Makes sense, considering it had a price.”

“Think of it as being for the best, Will. She is now honored, and her sacrifice led to Rocco’s demise.”

“That…is a *horrible* defense, Hannibal.”

In typical American fashion, Will was a lot slower to cool off than Hannibal was. It was a trait Hannibal found himself continuing to have to work with these days. It was easy to ignore in times past, during what he felt was necessary work, but nowadays, it was something he hated to see. Any implication that Will was unhappy was a sight that hurt Hannibal's eyes and heart alike, as if, despite his best efforts, he wasn’t trying hard enough.

Will let out a short laugh that was more like a huff, looking away and rubbing the lower half of his face. He seemed to be getting his bearings again, sort of, but in the wrong direction. That was another delicate aspect of Will’s mind: he could get so intensely frustrated with things that he would snap without ever meaning to, only for his hyperempathy to leave him wracked with extraordinary amounts of guilt.

From her room, Abigail assumed that Hannibal picked up on it at that moment. She didn’t hear any further arguing, or even comments. She could tell there was whispering, but unfortunately she did not have Will’s ear to hear it.

She hardly had her own ear, but regardless.

She cracked her door open.

“...Hey…” she began, awkwardly stepping out from her room. “Just curious– Are we still gonna do that stew Hannibal was talking about earlier?”

“Yes, we shall,” Hannibal was quick to respond, pulling away from the hug that was started out of her sight. “We simply have to retrieve the meat first.”

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One thing Hannibal probably should have seen coming from the beginning was Will's agility.

His ability to scale things faster than Hannibal could– fences, small walls, etc.– should really never have gone undetected until recently. It tended to cause Will to go further ahead of him, panic for a second when he realized Hannibal wasn't right next to him, then turn around and realize Hannibal hadn't yet scaled the spiked fence 20 feet back.

Tonight was slightly different. They were conversing the entire time.

"If I may clarify, Will, you never thought to kill him on your own?"

"What, so I who can barely dispose of a body properly could get the three of us arrested?"

"I have a higher degree of respect for your strategies than you do, it seems."

"You have a near idiotic degree of respect for them."

"You talk as if you've just started killing, Will."

"Compared to you? I might as well have. You remember the last time I tried on my own."

Hannibal didn't reply. Will's shoulders became tenser than they were moments ago. Hannibal's lack of response had led to Will catastrophizing what he could be thinking.

Truthfully, Hannibal merely figured that not providing any comment on the situation Will was referencing would avoid upsetting him. He was, unfortunately, wrong.

They rounded the corner silently, sneaking between buildings, through alleyways, until they were at last about two blocks from the venue Rocco typically found himself venturing into,

solely for its selling of vast amounts of alcohol. Looking toward the building, they found what they had come searching for. He seemed to have exited the building about 30 seconds prior, judging by the pace he kept.

Throughout Rocco's drunken waddling, he shone a flashlight ahead of him, ensuring he could at least vaguely see which two objects (which, to a sober individual, was only *one*) he was about to stumble into.

Will reached out to squeeze Hannibal's hand. Hannibal's expression softened. It was always Will's nonverbal way of making reassurances, such as *"I love you"* , *"I'm sorry"* , or in this instance, *"Hey, I know something pretty nasty happened between us, but I'm not exactly ready to annihilate you with a meat cleaver, and I hope the same goes for you. Truce until we talk again?"*

Regardless of the brief sweet moment, Rocco was clearly vigilant in some capacity. In his flashlight-shining, drunk stumbling, he may just be inclined to call out through the quiet streets for help, which would surely come quick enough for them to be caught.

Hannibal beckoned Will back part of the way that they came.

The two made their way far enough back that Rocco was now stumbling about four blocks away from the packed place. Perfect.

As per an earlier agreement, Hannibal would go in first due to the man's vigilance. Will almost wanted to reignite their previous argument solely to point that out, but managed to refrain.

Normally, Hannibal could get there almost undetected. The issue being, Rocco had very recently been fired from a position in a high-profile establishment in the area, hence the two knowing him to begin with. He worked security at a nearby museum, one that Will liked to walk through often, in which he had apparently gotten too close to a particular exhibit and thoroughly enraged the man, who had apparently lacked any amount of anger management. Or people skills, for that matter.

Will hadn't even touched the damned thing, and yet there Rocco was, saying something of vague meaning behind him. At least, to Will, it was vague. Will had turned around, confused, only for Rocco to ask a rather derogatory question about Will's brain function. Will wasn't particularly defensive about the ordeal, considering how used to the treatment he was, but he couldn't help wanting some degree of divine justice for a change. However, when he had brought up the potential murder to Hannibal, Hannibal had declined.

"Far too risky, love, though I admire your ambition."

Will had settled for manipulating one of Hannibal's friends into reporting the multiple rage-filled interactions Rocco had with the museum attendees, leading to his eventual termination.

"I just don't understand," Will had said to them, his face falsely contorted with worry and shame. *"What did I do wrong?"*

"Oh, dear, you're not the first," they had assured him, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder, fooled by his stellar acting. *"I think it's about time someone taught that man some consequences to his actions."*

Hannibal had raised a brow at it, but didn't question it. It wasn't anything that could land the two in hot water. He had known about Will's hatred for the man by then, just not the reason *why* .

Oh, if only he had known the reason why.

Will watched the scene ahead of him in the alleyway unfold, eyes locked on Hannibal.

It was a mistake to not keep a closer eye on Rocco. Despite his termination being due to his temper, he had very much been good at his job.

Rocco heard vague sounds of footsteps, and, in his inebriated state, assumed it was an attacker instead of investigating further. Granted, it was a correct assumption, but one that

wasn’t exactly spectacular for Will and Hannibal’s goal that night.

In Rocco’s hand, a special kind of flashlight he had gotten not so long ago. It had a setting to try and ward off any wild animals, or people for that matter: A rapid flash setting.

Will was used to what people would typically consider flashing lights. It made his head hurt like a bitch, but he could survive it. Mildly flashing lights would no longer cause the same sort of effect that they did in the past in Dr. Lecter’s office.

This flashing, on the other hand, was rapid. Incredibly rapid. Strobe lights at a concert rapid.

Hannibal, being ahead this time, did not notice Will go down.

The slaughter had begun, drowning out the sound of Will's head cracking against stone.

Hannibal made sure his knife sliced through Rocco's neck first, silencing him with waterfalls of blood. Hannibal slashed enough to send the man down to bleed out, and reached to shut the flashlight off. Annoying thing it was, but he was no more than temporarily visually stunned.

He looked down the alley to see Will very much not in the same state.

“ *Will* ?”

He was halfway to him by the time he finished saying his name. He dropped to the cold ground, grasping Will’s jaw in an attempt to steady it.

“ *Will* –”

No response. The shaking was getting worse, actually.

Hannibal was slower to realize what it was than he would typically be, mostly out of hope that it wasn't the case. He would have been content with discovering that the horrible shaking was a ruse, an act for Will's amusement. He would have been fine being lied to if he could come out the other end knowing for certain that Will was okay.

"He's having a mild seizure," the scene played back in his head.

"You don't seem too concerned ."

"I said it was mild," he had asserted.

A mild seizure.

"I said it was mild."

Mild.

This was not a *mild* seizure.

Hannibal held the back of Will's head. Through his vinyl gloves, he realized it was wet with blood. Will had hit the ground *hard* .

As Hannibal tried to steady Will's jaw, put pressure on the bleeding without hurting him, and overall tend to this terribleness, the realization was dawning on him. A horrific, daunting realization.

There was nothing he could do.

There was *nothing* he could do.

This was not the mild seizure in his office that he knew Will could recover from relatively unscathed. This was not a mere experiment. This was a potentially fatal accident.

Accident , he thought to himself, now feeling the concept was ridiculously inappropriate for the context.

They were here for a reason, very intentionally. They knew what Rocco had done for a living, they should have guessed at his preparedness. Had they grown so overconfident in their actions that they were no longer so careful?

Will was right.

Will was *right* .

And now Will may be dying.

Hannibal, losing control in a situation he was so used to having the most control in, had the hopeless urge to call an emergency number, to take him to a hospital, to do *something* . The corpse in the street said that was not an option.

And thus, a decision was made, watching his unconscious husband thrash on the ground: The body would stay to be discovered. They would go. *Now* .

——

The following two and a half weeks were horrible.

Following the seizure, Will remained unconscious for several minutes, before finally coming to, completely dazed and delirious. The bleeding had stopped, thankfully a minor injury, but the concussion definitely was not minor.

Sure, in terms of an actual concussion, it was a minor concussion. Mixed with the seizure recovery, however? Moderate at best.

Mixed with the illness as well? It might as well have been severe.

It was a relatively normal bacterial infection, transmitted from Rocco's blood on Hannibal's gloves to the wound on the back of Will's head. A gross oversight on Hannibal's part, but in his defense, there was no defense, it was a gross oversight.

At least, that's what Hannibal had clearly thought. Abigail had tried to calm him down to no avail. He was a surgeon, for God's sake. Panic or no panic, he should have known better.

Just as he should have known better than to go hunting with Will so shortly after an argument, as if it was some kind of remedy to clear the air.

More than anything, Hannibal was stuck silently fuming. The man was already dead, he couldn't exactly enact his vengeance, but God did he want to. There was nothing so infuriating as knowing that some disgusting slob had infected his lover with whatever bugs were crawling on him. That filthy, *wretched* thing. He never so much as deserved to lay his horrible eyes on Will, let alone ever speak to him, let *alone* risk his life in such a way.

At least no one seemed to be grieving him after his discovery.

This bug could not have been worse for Will's recovery. He was currently infected with a type of gram-positive bacteria, something that can be transferred via blood.

“ Graham -*positive bacteria,”* Abigail tried to joke to lighten the mood. Hannibal was about ready to suture her mouth shut.

It was all about to be worth it, Hannibal had thought. Will was done with the antibiotics Hannibal had been delivering intravenously, and had even briefly woken up every now and then (though was too disoriented, thanks to the sedatives). He should have mostly recovered from the concussion by now, if not fully, and the wound on the back of his head was too small to be much of a concern. And thus, Hannibal ceased the sedatives at last.

Will woke up one morning, Hannibal standing in the room. Will’s head was spinning, he was still dazed and disoriented, much to be expected.

Just as Hannibal went to speak, Will spoke first, with words that made Hannibal’s blood run cold.

“Who…are you?”

Chapter End Notes

thank you for reading! chapter 2 is on its way asap, they sort of go together but it felt better as its own chapter

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

in which we see will's perspective during and after the seizure

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The flashing lights made his head hurt instantly. He could barely see, but he could feel himself beginning to sway. His muscles were starting to tighten– he wasn't doing that. It was happening without his control. He began to lose balance.

The stone road was hard. His head hurt. His brain was on fire.

Hannibal–

Will was greeted by darkness, flooding his consciousness until he could no longer even remember why he was afraid. He vaguely remembered trying to sit up. He was in a…bed? He still could barely see, the entire room was a blur. He felt someone press him back down onto the bed. Not harshly, but gently…He didn't see their face. They were trying to help.

Hanni –

The next time he opened his eyes, he found himself in a heavily wooded area. There was no civilization in sight, just the woods, the leaf-covered ground…

And the doe in front of him.

Doe? Human…doe. Human? Human doe.

It was as if his brain couldn't decide what to imagine her as. In one half of a second he'd see a human, in the other he'd see a doe.

She was red nonetheless.

She smiled at him, but everything about it made him feel even more afraid than he already was. It was not a friendly smile. It was the smile of someone who was incapable of genuine friendliness, but who had found a way to fake it properly for whatever purposes would serve them.

Despite his fear, she smiled on.

"Good to see you again, Mr. Graham. Remembering your last hunt fondly?"

Will looked down. There was a rifle in his hand. He wanted to drop it, but something inside told him not to.

"What are you doing here?" he found himself asking before he could consciously think of who this doe even was.

"You know why I'm here. You're the one who found me. Here I was, on my way to take some photos…and along comes Will Graham."

The woods began to feel familiar.

"...Are you alive, Freddie?"

"Of course not," she said, her smile unwavering. "You made sure of that."

You made sure of that .

"Well what do you expect me to do, Hannibal? She's dead."

"Yes she is. You made sure of that."

"So are you gonna help or are you gonna bitch about it?"

"I was not scolding you, Will. I'm quite proud of your work here, in fact."

Pure panic spread through his body, the result of simultaneous lack of understanding and complete understanding. He gripped the rifle tightly, aiming it directly at her chest.

Her smile remained.

"Oh, Will Graham…You and I both know you prefer far worse methods than a merciful bullet."

He could hear voices around him, too inaudible to make out. It was infuriating and terrifying, trying to strain his ears to hear. It was…a deeper voice and a higher one. That was it. The higher one sounded…concerned? Will finally got some sort of audible glimpse of a few words. A young woman, trying to comfort someone. The person with the deeper voice, presumably.

He sounded anxious.

Hann –

The world around him faded to darkness, the doe menacingly waving goodbye. Her face had begun to blur beyond recognition. Who was she?

He began to hear the conversation from the voices around him.

“ *What did you just say?* ”

“*Graham*-positi–”

“That was rhetorical, Abigail, *not* an invitation to repeat it.”

“I’m sorry, I just figured–”

“ *Enough,* Abigail. Now is not the time.”

“...Do you want me to–”

“Leave.”

It sounded more for the deeper voice’s sake than anything. Tight, gripping anxiety. The sound of a man who wasn’t so used to being worried, who didn’t know how to go about it. Whoever he was, he was typically sure of himself it would seem.

He wasn’t so sure now.

Han –

The world around Will changed once more.

He found himself in a dimly lit dining room, the guest of honor sitting at the very end of the table.

Buck. Human…human buck?

More human than buck, but still a buck. Human with buck antlers.

Will stared in horror. The doe in the woods he could somewhat understand…but why was *this* here?

The buck gave him a sarcastic grin.

"Now don't look at me like that, Will. Don't pretend you don't know why I'm here. You're the one who called me, remember?"

Will's stomach dropped.

"Jack– Jack! It's me. Look, I know we planned for tomorrow, but he invited me over and I couldn't make it look like I was hesitant around him, and…Jesus Christ, Jack."

"Will, what's going on?"

"I–I don't even know what's going on with him, but he's planning something. He's gonna kill me, Jack."

"Will, slow down. Are you at his house?"

“Yes. Yes, I’m here.”

“Okay. I’m gonna come with as many squad cars as I can get, just hang ti–”

“No! Jack, they’re not gonna listen to you. You’re gonna waste time. The FBI never approved this, they still think I’m crazy for accusing him. It’s just us, Jack…we’re alone.”

“...Okay. I’m coming to get you.”

Will looked at the buck, similar yet far more controlled fear washing over him as it did before.

“Jack…”

“You tricked me, Will. Good job. Made me think you were in trouble. Made me think you needed help.”

Will shocked himself with the speed at which his fear transformed into anger. “Yeah…The one time you try to help me instead of making things worse for me. Hooray for you.”

The buck kept his sneer. “And now where we are. Look at us…Look at you.”

Will looked down at the knife in his hand, and at the blood which soaked through his shirt completely. When he looked back at the buck, he too was covered in blood, albeit with a lot more wounds.

“You happy now, Will? This what you wanted?”

“I just–”

“Don’t give me that shit, Will. You’re happy! This is what you two planned for. He plan the call, too? Or was that a Will Graham original?”

“Jack–”

“He got you, too, didn’t he?”

Will looked at the slash across his palm.

“Look what he did to you…What else is he gonna do, Will?”

“Why do you care so much?”

“What are friends for?”

Who said that?

“...It was an accident. He didn’t mean to. I…I was getting too wild, I got in his way while he was slashing and–”

“Exactly. So what do you think will happen when you inevitably get *wild* again, Will? That’s how you kill, isn’t it? He goes more smoothly, you go more brutally? He stabs with precision, Will. You stab with rage. How long had you been raging at me before you finally hunted me?”

“I–”

“And how long before he ends up slicing you up again because you’re so reckless?”

Will couldn’t respond. The room was beginning to fade. The face of the buck blurred. Who was this buck at his dinner table?

Whose dinner table was that?

Consciousness did not come as a tidal wave. It came more as the gentle waves on the shore, ebbing and flowing, pushing and pulling. It took a long time before it would allow Will, stuck on the shore, to fully feel it.

He opened his eyes to the sight of a man in his room.

Stranger .

Chapter End Notes

and finally, after a lengthy introduction, we get into the plot

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

> Will wakes up at last, having about a million questions that Hannibal struggles to find answers to. How will he respond in a way that won't freak Will out completely?

Chapter Notes

> i technically had this already written, but i needed to tweak it a bit to make it make sense. there were a few things it turns out i forgot to even add originally that would've made later events not make any sense whoops
>
> anyway, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal was frozen for a long moment.

He blinked, trying to have some sort of physical indicator that yes, he was in reality, currently. Will was sitting up in bed, looking around the room like it was completely foreign to him.

Damn the way that confusion looks so pretty on his face.

Hannibal swallowed.

“Will? It has been some time since you were last conscious…How are you feeling?”

He was avoiding the question. He *knew* he was avoiding the question. What could he do? Was he to give a complete recount of the past year or so of their endeavors? Was he to completely reintroduce himself? Start from scratch?

Will furrowed his brows, feeling his head through his now frizzy curls, which were far from defined after so long of lack of care. “I…feel fine, I guess? Tired still…I have a headache.”

“That is common to follow concussion recovery.”

“I had a concussion?”

“You hit your head very hard, Will.”

Will looked away, thinking. He was completely lost.

“...How did I hit my head?” he asked at last, not looking back at Hannibal.

Hannibal had the urge to stand by the bed, to reach down and set his hand under Will’s chin, to turn his face back up at him. Confusion or not, he needed those eyes on him after so long of their absence.

He suppressed it. A wise decision in the face of uncertainty.

“You had a terrible seizure, Will. You hit the ground when you fell unconscious.”

Will’s face contorted with worry. “I have seizures?”

Hannibal fought to ignore the tearing inside his chest. He hated any time that expression came onto Will’s face. The purpose of being here was to ensure he would never make that face again.

Damn the way that innocence presents itself in this man. Damn the way it's necessary to protect him. Damn the way it couldn't simply be a manipulative ploy. Damn the way that it's not his fault.

"...You used to. The condition that causes them has long since passed, but its effects can take years to fully vanish. You happened to come across rapidly flashing lights, and your brain could no longer handle it."

Will looked down, silently thinking once more.

Hannibal usually adored watching Will as he thought, watching as the cogs in his mind turned. Listening as Will would ask seemingly random questions, because he knew that they were always questions that followed Will's train of thought. One idea to another, like a chain reaction, and Hannibal was the only one besides Will capable of following the chain at all. Will usually furrowed his brow slightly, though sometimes he didn't if he was distant enough. His face always looked intense regardless, primarily because he was no longer focused on maintaining an expression that would please those around him.

This was not that look. This was the look of an anxious man.

Will finally met Hannibal's eyes again, and despite his earlier thoughts, Hannibal suddenly realized he no longer wanted Will to do so.

Damn those eyes. Damn the way that they beg for information. Damn the way that they're gentle only due to reverting to how he was before, not out of his typical love and adoration in recent times. Damn those knowledge-seeking eyes whose nature used to bring about such intimate yearning.

Thus far, Will at least knew what his name was. Hannibal had to venture for more than that.

"Will, how many personal details about yourself do you remember? Name, age, birthday?"

Will blinked. “Uh…My name is Will Graham, I’m 35, my birthday is–”

Hannibal was no longer listening. Will had gotten his age wrong. Will was 35 when they had first met. He was 37 now. Will was missing two years of memory.

Oh how tediously cruel the universe can be.

Hannibal was forced to refocus when he realized Will was staring at him.

“...Who are you?” Will asked again.

Hannibal was forced to consider for a moment. If Will had truly lost enough memory to not recall who Hannibal even was, then throwing everything at him at once would prove unsatisfactory. Will would become overwhelmed, unable to recall those memories either way. Hannibal had no desire to make him feel increasingly lost.

Damn the way he reminds you now of his past encephalitis. Damn the way you, for the first time in a very long time, feel the ache of sadness and responsibility in your chest. It’s unnatural to you, and it’s incredibly destructive.

“Please don’t lie to me,” you hear him cry. Shaking, tears streaming down his face, desperate for a grasp on reality that you ripped from his hands.

Would he cry if you lied to him now?

Would you see that wretched, pouting expression of torment again? Would he shake, shouting out his pleas to you, dreading the reality he couldn’t bear witness to, only able to hope that you would help him?

If there were no consequences here for a lack of self-preservation, would you help him? Would you help him now and risk his eventual disgust, or help yourself now and risk his

eventual terror?

Would you rather he be settled now, temporarily disgusted later, and eventually come around? Or do you want to risk him being afraid of you and all that your presence means?

Would you harm him in such a way?

Upon thinking that, Hannibal immediately realized that he would sooner cut off his own limb than see those pain-filled tears again, streaking down a face that was twisted with emotional agony. Will's face was meant to remain at peace. At its absolute worst, it could be angry. But not in pain.

Anything but pain.

Hannibal cleared his throat, having carefully chosen his next words.

"...I am your psychiatrist, Will."

Will grimaced, running a hand through his hair. Hannibal could guess that Will's history of psychiatrist-based hatred was running through his mind currently, though he said nothing about it if it was.

It was not truly a lie, as it was based on the relationship Will would have known at the very beginning of their interactions, despite Hannibal's insistence that they were merely friends having conversations. Will didn't need that instability right now. Will needed structure. Will needed someone who was close enough that he could trust, yet in enough of a position of care over Will that he would have order in his life and know that he was in good hands during such a trying time.

At least, that's what Hannibal hoped. He had no idea how long this would last. He would simply have to adjust as they went, as was usual of his care of Will.

“Is the amnesia really that bad?” was the question Will settled on asking when he finally found his voice again. His fingers caught tangles in his hair, and he winced.

Hannibal couldn’t avoid smiling slightly. “I was not originally here for the amnesia. You’ve had a plethora of cards in the hand you were dealt that you could never quite feel fond of, and thus we joined forces in order to allow you to see the beauty in them.”

Will’s face was one of complete perplexion.

Hannibal was not handling this well enough.

“You were experiencing hallucinations caused by stress as well as your previous brain condition,” Hannibal stated, hoping it would clarify the mess he just presented Will with.

“Oh...”

Hannibal raised his brows a bit. “Do you recognize any of that?”

“Uh…no…I don’t know anything about a brain condition.”

Damn it.

“I see…In that case, I cannot push the matter. If you truly cannot recall it, pressing will be of no use to either of us.”

Will nodded, pulling his knees to his chest, blanket still draped over him.

“So…Am I at some sort of hospital for the rich? I don’t remember ever being able to afford a room like this…”

Hannibal smiled. “You are in our home, Will. For the sake of your care, you have been staying with me for quite some time. We were never appreciative of the bureaucratic nightmare that was American healthcare laws.”

That wasn’t exactly a lie either. Hannibal did believe Will was here to be cared for, he had made that abundantly clear, and they had never really engaged in what was typical of patient-doctor relationships.

Will looked around. “Then…where are we?”

“Florence, Italy.”

“How did we get from the U.S. to Florence?”

“By plane, I assume. Swimming the Atlantic does prove rather difficult if you try.”

Will couldn’t help but give a soft laugh, despite the situation. Hannibal smiled at him. He was hoping that would lighten the mood, and was very much satisfied to discover that it had.

“So if I had some kind of head injury…why does it feel like my entire body got hit by several cars?” Will asked, rolling his shoulder a bit in an attempt to test his range of motion.

“Ah…Unfortunately, I had to keep you sedated. Your conditions were proving to take quite a toll on your recovery, thus I had to ensure you were completely rested in order to heal properly. On top of your head injury and seizure, you also became very ill. The illness and lack of movement most likely led to–”

“Hold on. You…sedated me?”

When Hannibal heard the words, he was so sure that when he looked at Will's face next, he would see a look of shock and betrayal. He avoided Will's eyes for this reason. Hannibal was not one to feel remorse, but that did not mean he didn't feel the consequences of his actions and the resulting emotions.

Damn those eyes. If you see them again, they're sure to be filled with the very pain you tried so desperately to avoid.

*You **cruel** man.*

"Are you sure you should be handling sedatives? I mean, you're a psychiatrist, but isn't that in medical territory?"

Hannibal had hardly ever felt such relief. There was no shock and betrayal, only confusion and concern at a moderate enough level to deal with.

"I became a psychiatrist after retiring my surgical career. I am very well acquainted with the usage of medical equipment."

"You're retired? You seem…a little young for that."

Hannibal grinned. "Not an official retirement. I use the term to simply mean…I laid it to rest."

Will went to ask another question, but the thunderous sound of running down the hall cut him off.

"Is he awake? I heard you talking."

Abigail ran to the doorway, looking in to see Will very much awake now. She smiled, giving him a wave. He wasn't sure what to do, so he simply waved back.

Will looked at Hannibal, hoping for some kind of answer.

Hannibal turned to her briefly, trying to hide any hint of annoyance at her sudden interruption because, truthfully, he shouldn't be so annoyed at her concern for Will's well-being.

"...Will, this is Abigail. You don't remember her, I'm sure, but she has been living with us."

Abigail gave Hannibal a look of confused horror. Will tilted his head.

"I take it she's a student who needed somewhere to stay?"

"Yes," Hannibal replied, quickly to ensure that Abigail couldn't beat him to answering. "I am quite fond of her major, and I do my best to assist students in their endeavors."

Will nodded, seeming to understand and accept the response.

Abigail hadn't dropped her gaze. Hannibal looked at her, trying to somehow explain the entire situation solely with his eyes. Somehow, Abigail understood enough to walk away and leave them to it. Better to let Hannibal deal with it and fill her in later than to interrupt and ruin something.

What a bright young woman.

"Am I *married* ?"

Hannibal's neck almost cracked with how fast he looked at Will again. Will was holding out his hand, his wedding band on his ring finger.

...Fuck .

"You were," Hannibal found himself explaining before truly thinking about it.

"...Were…past tense."

"I'm afraid he isn't around."

Hannibal repressed a sigh at Will's puzzled expression. He already had to deal with trying to jog his memory, and having no idea how long that would take. He had no clues to go off of as to just how broken Will's memory was. He did not need to sit through Will rediscovering his orientation as well.

"What was… *he* …like?" Will asked, careful with his words.

"He cared very much for you," Hannibal explained.

I care very much for you still. Please remember at least that.

"...I'm a widow," Will said, his voice growing quiet.

"Of sorts."

Incredible answer. Wonderful job so far. What next? Shall you explain that he killed the father of the sweet girl that had just come in to check on his recovery? How else will you worry him in this interaction?

“Of sorts? What does that mean?”

“Will, I must ask you,” Hannibal began, completely dodging the question. “How much do you remember from your life?”

Will’s brow furrowed again.

“...My house. And…my dogs…A man named Jack?”

Hannibal’s jaw clenched slightly at the mention of Jack Crawford.

“What did you say on the phone, Will?”

“Nothing much. Just enough to get him here.”

“...He is worried for you, isn’t he?”

“Kinda poetic that the first time he sincerely worries about me is the night he dies, isn’t it?”

“And you feel no regret for it?”

“...He’ll haunt me. I know he will. But he would haunt me if we didn’t kill him a whole lot worse than he’ll haunt me now.”

If we didn’t kill him.

We.

Hannibal blinked, as if that could force the vision of Will on that evening out of his head.

Will looked up at him, eyes wide. “I was a teacher. I remember that. I had students…and a– wait. I was a professor I think? The classroom was like a professor's.”

Hannibal nodded along. It would seem that despite having a general timeframe of lack of memories, it wasn’t as rigid as Hannibal believed at first. How silly it would be if it had been, and how silly Hannibal was to believe it at first.

“How do you remember Jack, Will?”

Will’s face was that of complete concentration to a frustrating extent. “I…he…He came up to me after class. He adjusted my glasses… *for* me…” There was a degree of bewilderment in his voice when he recited Jack’s actions. It was a bizarre action indeed. “…Then he asked where on the spectrum I am. He needed my help with something…”

Hannibal raised his brows, very grateful now that Abigail wasn’t currently present to hear about this case again.

“Do you remember what he needed help with?”

“No, I don’t.”

“Do you remember what you used to teach?”

Will shook his head, looking away. “I don’t…I can’t remember. I’m sorry…”

Hannibal tried not to let his disappointment show. In that story, it wouldn't have been long before he showed up, and yet Will didn't even remember being a criminal profiler.

"No need to apologize to me, Will. This is not your fault."

Will swallowed. "...I can't help feeling like it is. Shouldn't I have been avoiding seizure triggers if I had a seizure disorder?"

"Will. You were many months into recovery. You could not have known."

"You know me, yet you're a complete stranger to me. Is that not doing anything to you?"

Hannibal sighed.

"...Of course it is, Will. However, your well-being is currently far more important."

Will took a breath, rubbing his face.

"...So then what's your name?"

Ah. And there was the question indeed. They were under false identities in Florence, and Hannibal had no way of knowing if Will would blow their cover.

…But those anxious eyes beckoned him to tell the truth, regardless.

Damn those eyes .

"I am Dr. Hannibal Lecter. Though I am afraid I do not have the freedom of practicing under that name here."

He grinned at Will's suddenly far more concerned expression. "Unfortunately, there were simply too many people interested in your treatment. You would not be left alone, and neither would I. Hence, I believed it was best to bring you here. Here in Florence, I practice under the name of Dr. Roman Fell. Nobody will interrupt us here."

Will blinked, struggling for a moment to process the information.

"...Why did so many people care what was going on with me? And why did you care enough to do something so extreme?"

Hannibal smiled. "Because you are very special, Will. Everyone you encounter knows it."

Will almost seemed to shrink. "...I don't think I'm all that special. More of a pariah among peers, from what I can actually remember…"

"They do not understand your gift."

"It's not a gift, it's just…a trait."

"A trait?"

"An autistic trait, Hann– uh…Dr. Lecter."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. Will continued.

"People view autism as if it's a sliding scale between being completely unable to function independently, and being socially inept with some kind of brain superpower. And whatever brand of it they peg me with, they always assume a low kind of empathy…They don't know how to tolerate hyperempathy, even if that’s the very ‘brain superpower’ they think I have."

Hannibal smiled. Will speaking freely about such things already was a good sign. Perhaps, despite the absence of memories, he still felt some degree of their effects. How far did that stretch?

"Would it not be beneficial to put yourself in other people's shoes?"

"It's not just that…That would just be regular empathy."

As the conversation continued, Will seemed drained. Hannibal sat on the edge of the bed, hoping to steer the conversation in a more lighthearted direction. For Will's sake, considering…well, everything.

"In that case, perhaps it is both beneficial and harmful, like many things can be. You understand those around you, but to such a degree that they are scared off. You personify everyone and everything…Can I guess, perhaps, that you feel the need to apologize to your blanket for gripping it so harshly?"

Will actually laughed at that last part, earning him an affectionate smile from Hannibal.

"God, no…I don't think I'd be able to handle it if it got that out of hand."

"You're not the only one to deal with hyperempathy in this world, Will. You must remind yourself that your worth lies beyond aspects of yourself that you cannot control. Though it is just as good to appreciate those aspects of yourself."

Will tiredly rubbed one of his eyes, smiling shyly at Hannibal. "Yeah…thanks."

Hannibal extended a hand forward.

“Do you believe you have the ability to stand on your own, Will?”

“Oh. Uh…We’re about to find out,” Will said with a dry laugh at the end.

Will stood, holding onto Hannibal’s hand for any necessary support. Fortunately, it didn’t seem that such support was needed. He was a bit stiff at first, needing to stretch his legs a bit, but took a step forward without much difficulty afterward.

He gave Hannibal a hopeful look.

“Seems like I can after all.”

Hannibal smiled back. “It seems like you can after all, indeed.”

Will glanced at his hand, which Hannibal was still holding. When met Hannibal’s eyes again, Will had an expression of polite confusion: ever so slight, and yet he wouldn’t dare question this.

Hannibal removed his hand from Will’s. He refused to let it show just how tentatively he had done it.

“Well then, I suppose a tour is in order.”

“A tour?”

“You should know about the layout of where you reside, Will. I cannot have you getting lost.”

Will tilted his head. “Is it really that big?”

Hannibal smiled. “Large enough.”

With that, Hannibal opened the door wider, gesturing for Will to step through first.

“After you, Mr. Graham.”

It took focus not to say ‘Mr. Lecter’ as he usually would in a lighthearted scenario.

———

Hannibal almost wished he could have taken a photograph of Will’s face when he stepped out of that smaller hallway and into the main room.

The place they lived in was as if Versailles had an open-floor plan. Gilded walls with paintings that looked like they were from the Renaissance itself. There was most likely some historical error in Will’s thoughts of the room, but he didn’t really care at the moment.

It was like standing in a palace.

Hannibal gestured to the living space with a smile. “This is our home, Will.”

Our home.

“This is our home, Will.”

“Hannibal, how did–...How do we have–...”

“I was able to make some last-minute arrangements.”

“Hannibal, this is insane *.”*

“Truly. I will provide you with the details over dinner.”

“Does Abigail know how you got us this place?”

“Of course she does. She helped with the bodies.”

Hannibal blinked. That had been a poor choice of words on his account. Even in all of his mental strength, he couldn’t prevent the opening of doors in his memory palace.

They had arrived in Florence, with Hannibal taking a ride in the night, scoping out the city in search of who he could overthrow.

There was Dr. Roman Fell, a perfect candidate. People were to be rather pleased with Hannibal’s demeanor as opposed to the one Dr. Fell had with others. Then there was the issue of his wife, poor Lydia Fell. She had to die, of course, which allowed Hannibal to get their ducks in a row.

Hannibal had allowed a rumor to spread: Lydia Fell, discovering her husband wasn’t as straight as she had believed, ran off without a trace to avoid the shame she felt as a result. And thus, Roman married his new lover, and adopted the lover’s daughter.

“Daughter from a previous marriage,” Hannibal had said around others. He could practically feel the rage radiating off of Will, though Will was unable to express it in public. Instead, Will had completely turned away Hannibal’s usual affections when they had returned home.

“Garrett Jacob Hobbs was not a marriage *,”* Will had hissed. *“I emptied a clip into his chest. If that’s your idea of marriage, I should probably run.”*

It was a sore subject, even to this day. To kill someone was one thing, but to have your first kill continue to haunt you was another. Will had known he couldn’t exactly threaten Hannibal (nor did he want to), but to suggest running from him, even sarcastically, was enough to get his message across.

Hannibal had wanted to provide Will with as good of a life as he could here. Abigail, too, of course.

And yet, here Will was–

Hannibal’s focus was recentered to the present-day Will. Will was shuffling on the floor uncomfortably as he looked at everything.

Most likely due to being barefoot on cold tile.

“Please excuse me for a moment,” Hannibal stated, abruptly ending the awkward silence in the room. He quickly made his way back to the room he had kept Will in prior, retrieving a set of slippers.

It was beginning to become worrisome how easily his mind was pulled from the present. He had to keep his attention on Will, ensuring that he could recover from whatever type of amnesia this was. And yet his mind slipped back into the rooms of his memory palace, opening both fond doors and agonizing ones.

Even without intending to, Will had a vice grip on Hannibal’s mind.

Oh how he would love to know that, if only he could understand now.

“You’re up!”

Hannibal stepped out of the room, looking down the hall.

Abigail had exited her room, smiling wide as she made her way toward Will, who was currently looking quite like he’d rather not be there at all.

“Uh…yeah. Hi,” he finally replied, forcing an awkward smile.

That smile reminded Hannibal fondly of the first days of their–

No. Enough of that.

Hannibal approached, handing the slippers to Will.

“Forgive me, I hadn’t minded the cold floor,” he said, smiling.

Will seemed surprised, albeit pleasantly. He accepted the gift, not knowing that he already owned those slippers to begin with.

“Ah– Thanks.”

Once he was no longer doomed to wander a cold floor, he roamed the room a bit more.

Though his expression was no longer one of wonder.

“Will?” Hannibal asked, tentatively approaching.

Will turned to him, brows knitted. “I just…can’t wrap my head around this whole thing.”

“...Oh my– Your glasses. I’m terribly sorry, I completely forgot about your–”

“It’s not the glasses, Doctor. I’m not completely blind without them, thankfully.”

“What is it, then, Will?”

Will swallowed. “I…I’ve never exactly been fond of psychiatrists. They always try to pry my head open, as if whatever they think is wrong with me isn’t in plain view.”

“Truly you don’t believe that your neurodivergence is wrong?”

“No, I’m saying others often do.”

Hannibal nodded. Though, with the direction this conversation was going, his throat became tight. “...What’s wrong, then, Will?”

Will shook his head. “Nothing’s wrong, per se, aside from, y’know, memory loss. I just can’t believe I somehow ended up finding a psychiatrist I actually got along with well enough to *live* with.”

“Unless he kidnapped you,” Abigail piped up.

Hannibal shot her a disapproving look, but the expression melted when he heard Will snort.

“Yeah, I, uh…I guess there’s that possibility. Especially with the different names…You never told me if mine changed, by the way.”

For the love of God.

“Ah, yes. To avoid the typical questions we may receive as patient and doctor, and to avoid our discovery here, we had to assume drastically different identities.”

Will tilted his head. “How drastic?”

Here it was.

“Husbands.”

Will raised his eyebrows, but aside from a soft laugh, he didn’t seem to react strongly at all. Perhaps it was the idea of them pretending that made it easier to swallow.

Would it be so hard to swallow if it wasn’t pretend?

Hannibal found himself hyper-analyzing everything about Will’s reaction to the concept. He found himself disappointed by just how regular it was.

Did you expect shock? Were you hoping for it? Would you have delighted in watching his face burn red with the prospect of acting as your spouse? Do you miss it so badly already?

Focus, you lovestruck fool.

Will spoke up at last. “That’s, uh, *wow* . I guess that really does avoid questions, doesn’t it?”

“Thus far, rather successfully. Those who have tried to pry have been immediately deemed rude by their peers and promptly shut down.”

“Hell of a way to go about it, though. Anything to get rid of prying eyes is appreciated, I guess.”

“There were not many alternatives.”

Will nodded. “I guess I just find it hard to believe. I already said that, didn’t I? It’s still true nonetheless. Guess I just pictured the wrong sort of dynamic is all.”

“Then what are you currently imagining about our dynamic, Will?”

Will smiled. “That you must be a pretty good psychiatrist if you managed to get me to trust you.”

——

Will seemed surprised when the bowl of soup was set down in front of him.

“You haven’t eaten on your own in quite some time,” Hannibal explained. “Thank modern medicine for feeding tubes, but it would make little sense to keep you on one now. You should ease yourself into eating normally.”

Will seemed to understand, picking up the spoon left for him. “What kind of soup is it?”

Hannibal smiled. “A simple vegetable stew with noodles. I was unsure if your digestive system was ready for meat yet.”

Will gave him a grateful smile, then began to eat. His eyes widened.

“Holy sh– This is *good* .”

Hannibal smiled, even as Will spoke with his mouth full. He hadn’t seen Will engage with his cooking for a while, so table manners came second to seeing him enjoy the meal.

Truth be told, the only meat Hannibal could think to include would have been from the man who caused this to begin with. Hannibal had refused to even harvest anything from him. That disgusting excuse for a man didn’t deserve to join them at the table in any capacity.

Though that meant Hannibal would need to procure some other meat soon.

Chapter End Notes

personally, i find the chapters after this a lot more interesting, but i'll try not to hype them up too much LOL. let me know your thoughts!

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

In which the family navigates their first night and day after Will's memory loss.

Chapter Notes

this one's a bit more angsty whoops. but we're into more plot territory now so there's that!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The feeling of sending Will off to bed without him was…indescribable.

What was there to be said about having to make sure your spouse was settled and comfortable, but not being able to share that comfort with him? What was there to be said about the walk of shame back to your original room, the inherent loneliness gripping at your ankles, as if your deepest woes took form solely to try to drag you back to your love, as if asking *"Why? Why are you leaving him alone? Why isn't he coming with us?"* ? Could anything be said about having to try to shake off its vice grip, continuing your walk alone to the place you had shared with him? Could anything be said about lying on your side of the bed, because even while alone, that other side belongs to *him* , and you dare not invade his space, even with him unable to be there?

Could anything be *done* ?

The answer was no, nothing could be done. And therefore, nothing was to be said.

People would prefer to go about their day pretending that a vicious killer like Hannibal Lecter was completely devoid of emotion. Surely, only someone who couldn't feel would perform such heinous acts.

People tended to not understand that empathy was a very powerful weapon as much as it was a beautiful skill. People loved to feel as if their minds were private, and that nobody could read their thoughts like a novel. Will had proved those people wrong, and they hated him for it. He was an instant pariah, and yet, had he not had any empathy at all? They would hate him far worse.

Hannibal's empathy was much different. It was deliberate. He could control every aspect of it. He could use it to step into someone else's head, particularly to divine what they know, and what they fear.

"Extreme acts of cruelty require extreme empathy," a wise woman once told him.

A cruel man you are indeed.

And yet, despite Hannibal's grip on his empathy, his emotions themselves were another beast altogether. He never lied about his emotions, truly. When he wept to Bedelia after Will was condemned to the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, he was not faking those tears.

The same heartbreak could be felt here, only far, far greater.

It was one thing to hold out hope that you could have somebody. It was another thing entirely to already have someone, only to have them ripped from your arms by something neither party could control. It was one of the universe's most depraved forms of torture.

It was a divine act of cruelty.

Hannibal had often asked himself, and others, if God feels good when he kills people. What he had never thought to ask until now was if God feels good when the damned souls of Hell are tortured at his own request. Did God feel good condemning someone to burn? Or was Hell eternal isolation and solitude, like some religious folk believed?

Hannibal was known for his own divine acts of cruelty. He already knew that it felt good to kill.

How did it feel to condemn a soul to isolation?

The worst part of all of the torment he currently went through was, perhaps, the acknowledgement of his own role. The pondering of his own actions, and what part he had to play in their current situation. Empathy and remorse are not interchangeable, it would seem.

Here was empathy.

Will was in pain. Will was isolated. But Hannibal had condemned him to isolation before, hadn't he?

Hannibal, in his desperate grasp for control, in his plot to ensure he remained free and Will's mind remained tormented enough to kill, had everyone convinced that Will was a serial killer. He had ensured that every person Will held dear turned on him unless they were professionally curious in the way he hated most. Even good Beverly Katz, who had died at Hannibal's own hand, had only gone to see Will for the sake of business. Will did not have a friend. None except for Hannibal, that was, and look where that had led to. Those scars on Hannibal's forearms would never fully fade. The noose slipped around his neck would always leave a phantom sensation, an eternal reminder of the wrath of Hannibal's sacrificial lamb.

Will has felt the pain of isolation before. It was Hannibal who had condemned him to it, in the hopes that Will would be his alone and grow to understand him. Hannibal got what he wanted…as far as Will had let on.

Hannibal hadn't even noticed the tears pouring from his eyes until he looked at his forearms, along the lengthy scars. Remorse was not something Hannibal could feel in this instance, but empathy very much was.

Heartbreak was as well.

How pathetic to wish he could comfort you now.

He would. You know that he would. Despite his anger and hatred and vengeance, he would be here if he could. Perhaps that's why the sting of his absence affects you so deeply.

The universe gave you a forgiving man, and the universe ripped him away.

Ripped from the Ripper.

One big, cruel joke.

He could feel Will's isolation. It was a horrid, soul-crushing feeling that Hannibal had hoped, *prayed* even, he would never have to feel again. He and Will both.

One oversight. One gross oversight.

Some God you are, toying with the strings of fate as you do.

How long until Will, tiring of his pain, becomes a nonbeliever?

———

It had taken Will an unfortunately long time to be able to fall asleep, his mind racing with thoughts about the day. It had been…overwhelming, to say the least.

Will found himself in an unfamiliar yet familiar place, while awake and now while asleep.

Dark. The walls of the place were almost mildewy, they clearly hadn't been cleaned in some time. Whoever runs this place doesn't care much about the appearance of what is meant to deter people from visiting, does he? You are not people with folks who care about you. You are exotic animals kept out of the public eye for his amusement and his reputation.

You're in a cage. Of course he caged you. He loves keeping wild animals in crates, like a collection. An incredibly dangerous collection.

You push the door open. You step out.

Who unlocked it?

You walk toward a window, gazing up at the sunlight you've missed for an unfortunate amount of time, and not by your own choice either.

Whoever is behind you is rambling. What the hell is he saying?

"Hawks are solitary," you reply to him, as if an obvious answer to whatever he had said. Like muscle memory. Like you've answered him before.

You've answered him before.

"Maybe that's their weakness," he replies, his voice lower, almost as if intentionally trying to be soothing. Or convincing.

You do not need to be soothed. Or perhaps you do, but you won't admit it. You're beyond desiring a warm embrace the way you did on your first day here.

You want blood.

He will do that for you.

"Anything for a friend."

Will jolted upright, gasping for air. His shirt and hair were completely soaked in sweat.

Matthew , his brain told him. *That man's name was Matthew.*

What did you do?

———

Hannibal had places to be. Why did he remain here in hesitation?

Hannibal sat on the edge of his bed in deep contemplation.

If this was the act he was to maintain, he would have to make it *substantially* convincing. Will was a sharp mind, Hannibal was sure of it even with Will's memory loss. Will would notice even subtle details, and would work to uncover the truth. If he couldn't recall his life with Hannibal, and then discovered that Hannibal was now lying to him, the consequences would be absolutely devastating. There would be no going back. Hannibal's only option would be to have Will remain here by force, fighting and frightened, until his memory somehow returned. The mere thought of that nearly drove him to the brink of insanity.

Will was to remain here of his own accord. Will was to have free will in all things. Which meant that Hannibal had only one course of action to ensure the details would line up.

With a move that felt as if he were chopping off his own finger, Hannibal removed his wedding band, placing it in the pocket of the jacket he would wear to work that day. He was only to wear it to maintain the “disguise”, not around the house.

Please God, let it one day cease to be a disguise. You cannot bear this for long.

——

“So!”

Abigail sat across from Will, setting down two cups of tea. Hannibal unfortunately had to do his actual job, which left Abigail in charge of dealing with Will for the day. Will didn’t particularly mind, she was nice enough, but he did feel bad for keeping her from her studies.

“What do you remember about yourself?” she asked.

He grimaced slightly. “That’s a broad category…”

“Okay, let’s start smaller then…What would you say is your happy place?”

“A bit personal to start with, isn’t it?”

“You used to talk about wanting to share it with me.”

“Did I?” Will picked up the tea, attempting to sip it despite it still steaming. He winced as he burned his lip. “I don’t remember anything about you. Dr. Lecter didn’t mention us actually knowing each other aside from you staying here.”

“He doesn’t wanna overwhelm you with information. I can’t blame him…But I do think it’s fair to give you some kind of baseline.”

Will nodded. “Yeah, sounds about right.”

He expected her to continue with said baseline, but she just looked at him expectantly. He sighed.

“Right…happy place…Let me think.”

The first thing to come to mind was a woodland area–

Doe .

He shook his head, as if trying to physically get the thought out. Not the woods, then.

A river.

He could remember standing in a river. Casting a line out.

“I’m a good fisherman, Jack.”

“Fishing, I guess,” he said quickly, trying to power through the brief glimpse of a memory.

Abigail smiled. “You used to talk about working on boats. Makes sense.”

He gave a wry smile. He had no gauge of how much information about him she had, which left him feeling like this interaction was horrifically unbalanced.

“What about you?” he finally asked. “What’s your happy place look like?”

Abigail stiffened.

Will frowned. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to–”

“No, no, it’s fine,” she assured him. “Just…I used to have a happy place with my dad. But it was only happy because it was all I knew. You guys sort of helped me realize how messed up the situation was…”

“So you’re not just here because you’re a student?”

Abigail laughed. “I mean, technically yes, but that’s not the whole reason, no. I’m studying medicine, hence why Hannibal wants to help me so much, but uh…there’s more to it than that.”

Will’s brow furrowed in thought, trying to figure out what else there could be. He figured she was omitting information to not overwhelm him, but it was certainly difficult to get an understanding of their situation without it.

“...So medicine, huh?” he asked, trying to get the topic onto something less stressful. “How’s that been going?”

She smiled. “Good, shockingly. Turns out I have a knack for anatomy. Who knew?”

Will couldn’t help but feel like that was meant to be some kind of joke, but he couldn’t figure out what was funny about it.

“It’s not difficult for you?”

“Not as much as I thought it’d be. Plus, I have Hannibal’s help if I’m struggling with any of it. He’s really smart with all of it.”

Will couldn’t help but let out a short laugh. Smart, she said. That didn’t seem to nearly summarize Dr. Lecter’s knowledge enough. Everything about him oozed sophistication. Will wondered if, during Dr. Lecter’s career, he had ever published anything, and if his colleagues could even understand what was written.

Dr. Lecter seemed…odd. Not in an uncomfortable sense, but he most definitely wasn’t presenting his full, true self to Will. Once again, most likely to ease Will’s mind, but Will was already beginning to grow tired of not receiving enough information about the only two people around him.

The frustration felt eerily familiar in a way that made Will’s skin crawl.

Abigail’s phone buzzing broke Will out of his thoughts.

“What do you know, it’s him,” she said with an awkward laugh. Will gave her a confused look.

“He texts you while he’s working?”

“He doesn’t constantly have his hands full, he just needs to be there. He’s asking about you,” she explained.

Will’s shoulders stiffened, as did his jaw. Abigail gave him a look of concern.

"...What's on your mind?"

"I can't help but feel like I'm…under surveillance, somehow. Everyone knows things that I don't, and I'm not allowed to know, even if it's about me. And then they wanna know what's in my head."

Abigail nodded. "I get that, I really do. You can always talk to Hannibal about it when he comes home. He'd hate to think you're uncomfortable here."

Will just nodded silently, sipping his scalding tea. That was sure to be a delightful conversation.

Somehow, the idea of confronting Dr. Lecter made him unbearably nervous.

Abigail seemed to sense it. Her brow furrowed and she reached over, gently setting her hand on top of his.

"Hey…We both really care about you. I know you're not used to that, but…We just want you to be okay. He'd really appreciate it if you were honest with him."

Will nodded, looking down at his tea.

Despite his silent agreement, he had an eerie feeling that he wasn't going to be able to be as honest as Abigail wanted him to be. Something deep inside, a sense of self-preservation, told him things would be better that way. That he would be safer that way, if Hannibal didn't know everything going on in his head. Or perhaps Hannibal would be safer.

"Anything for a friend."

He sipped his tea, trying to avoid the lump building in his throat.

———

Hannibal arrived home, groceries in hand.

“My apologies for being so late, I figured I would retrieve us some dinner before returning,” he explained with a smile, setting the basket down on the kitchen counter, though ensuring that the meat inside would quickly be placed in the refrigerator.

Will nodded from his position at the table, fidgeting around with the cup of the remnants of his tea that had been cold for hours now.

Hannibal was quick to catch on.

He made his way over from the counter, sitting beside Will on the adjacent chair at that corner of the table.

“Will? Is something wrong?”

Will bit the inside of his cheek, trying to put a harsh stop to the sudden flow of emotion that swept over his mind. He had been able to prevent it from growing earlier, but it was far more difficult with Hannibal in the room.

“Anything for a friend,” the words echoed in his mind.

Did you use someone to hurt him?

“It’s nothing,” Will croaked through a tightened throat.

Hannibal's expression melted into concern. He gently set his hand on top of Will's wrist, igniting the nerves in Will's stomach.

"Will. I will not force you to talk with me about it if you're truly so uncomfortable, but I need you to know that you can always talk to me. You're struggling right now, and the last thing you need is to feel alone."

Will was finding it increasingly difficult to keep his head clear. He looked away, knowing that he was tearing up by now.

"Just a bad dream and overthinking. Ridiculous, isn't it?"

"Nothing that bothers you is ridiculous, Will," Hannibal said, his voice lowered to a soothing tone. "Different things bother different people. Every individual has a different threshold. What one person can survive would kill the next. Do not mock yourself for feeling the way that you do."

A crack in the dam turned it into a pile of rubble, the lake it previously held back gushing over the debris.

Will broke down, pulling his hands from the cold cup to cover his overflowing eyes. All at once, he felt so weak, so isolated. He needed so much care right now, yet simultaneously he was bothering everyone around him, and simultaneously he didn't fully feel safe with at least one of them, and he didn't even know why. His memory loss was nothing but a burden on himself and others, and he couldn't fix it, and neither could they.

He felt a warm hand on his shaking shoulder.

"Will…Please. Talk to me."

If he hadn't known any better, he'd think there was a twinge of desperation in Dr. Lecter's voice.

Will finally looked up, trying to wipe his face free of tears.

"I'm not allowed to know anything," he finally got out. "Everyone knows things I don't, and I can't remember any of it, just little awful moments that I can't explain…It feels *horrible* , and it feels *familiar* , and I don't know why."

Hannibal gently rubbed Will's shoulder, trying to provide some degree of comfort.

"Will…I cannot imagine how lost you feel right now. All I can do is try to be a pillar of stability in your life. If I were to fill you in on everything that has happened since we've known each other, you would be beyond overwhelmed, you would be distraught. Your sense of familiarity is not wrong, Will. You have unfortunately had tragic run-ins with mental instability and lost time before, and to try to force you to recall all of that…I couldn't bear to do that to you. It is difficult to do so, but we are forced to try to ease you into familiarity until you can recall your past on your own."

Will took a deep, shaky breath, starting to calm down at last. "That makes sense…"

"It would be akin to treating a patient with dementia by repeatedly bringing them to the grave of a loved one they lost. It won't cure anything, and at that point, it becomes nothing more than ignorant cruelty. I refuse to be cruel to you, Will."

Will nodded, wiping the rest of his tears away. He looked at Hannibal, his eyes still red and puffy.

"Thank you. I didn't know what kind of response I'd get, I guess I just…feared the worst."

"You have negative experiences with psychiatry, Will. Your apprehension makes perfect sense. I cannot try to convince you that I am not like the rest, you will have to come to that

conclusion on your own."

Will laughed a bit, crossing his arms and leaning back. "Different how? Because you actually give a shit about your patients?"

Hannibal smiled. "I most certainly do."

Abigail entered the room, finally deeming it safe to do so. Hannibal glanced over to her.

"Abigail, if you could do us both a favor?"

"Yeah?"

"Could you show Will how to use the tub in the bathroom?"

Will shrank slightly, seeming almost insecure. He hadn't been focusing on how he felt physically as much as mentally, but…he could definitely use a shower. Though by the sound of it, baths were the only option. Unless Hannibal just wanted something soothing for him. He looked away, hoping the tinge of red on his cheeks were masked by how red his face had already been from crying.

He regretted not telling Hannibal about the nightmare that had really sent him over the edge, but he felt he had worried him enough for one day.

———

After making sure Will was settled, and waiting on the other side of the door to ensure he didn't fall in there, Abigail went back to her bedroom, going through her tabs and ensuring that she hadn't forgotten to submit some necessary assignments.

She reentered the main room, right in the nick of time.

"Hannibal!"

He looked up, his cleaver swung upward, ready to come down on the kidney on his cutting board.

"Hello, Abigail. I take it Will is successfully bathing?"

"What the hell are you doing?"

Hannibal looked at the kidney, then back at Abigail, slightly confused. "...Preparing dinner."

"You're gonna feed him a person without him knowing?" Abigail scolded in a hushed voice, trying to ensure Will would not hear her.

"It is what was done before, I cannot imagine it will go horribly this time around."

"He literally tried to have you killed last time. Besides, he is *fragile* right now. You saw him break down! What's he gonna do when he finds out? It's *absolutely* gonna be worse, Hannibal!"

Hannibal paused, considering her argument.

…He put the kidney away, reaching for beef instead.

The day had been rough enough without causing Will another mental breakdown.

If only it could stop replaying in Hannibal's mind.

He sits at the table, shuffling uncomfortably. You know he has something on his mind, but he won't speak. He's uncomfortable. He's anxious.

It's because of you.

You ask what's wrong, and he avoids the issue. You have the audacity to press, and the floodgates open.

He cries. You didn't even lie to him this time, and still he cries. He cries because of you.

Again.

Hannibal quickly pulled his hand back, hissing at the sharp pain in his finger. He had managed to stare directly through a door in his mind palace without focusing enough on what he was doing. He figured chopping meat was muscle memory by now, and yet here he was, slicing his own finger.

"Oh god– Are you okay?"

Hannibal looked up, momentarily surprised, and saw Will standing in the doorway in a bathrobe, hair still wet from his bath.

If only you could venture over there to dry it for him, but he would be stunned at such intimate care from his oh so regular psychiatrist.

You've been a patient man before, and you will be one now.

“It is only a small cut, nothing major,” Hannibal answered with ease, setting the knife down and moving to the sink, washing his hands to disinfect the small wound.

Will momentarily disappeared from his peripherals, but when he reappeared he made his way over to Hannibal, holding a small box of bandages.

“I, uh…Saw these in the bathroom. Figured you’d want one now.”

Hannibal looked up, drying his hands, smiling.

“I very much would. Thank you, Will.”

Hannibal began to reach for the box, but before he could, Will already had his hand inside, pulling out a small bandage.

For a moment, it was clear that Will intended to place it onto the wound himself.

How thoughtful.

A second later, Will seemed to realize how awkward that may be, and handed the bandage to Hannibal for him to place himself.

Hannibal found himself incredibly disappointed, but placed the bandage nonetheless.

“...I’ve been thinking, Will.”

“Oh?”

“Perhaps we should resume your therapy as normal.”

Will gave him a confused, almost concerned look. “Uh…I can’t exactly remember anything we talked about before.”

“You don’t have to. You’re struggling right now, and that is all that matters. You need to be able to talk about these complicated emotions, Will.”

You cannot stand to see them devour him again.

Will nodded, shuffling awkwardly. “Right…That’d probably help, wouldn’t it? At least, if it helped before.”

“Most certainly,” Hannibal agreed with a smile. “You had been making excellent progress. Let’s hope you can make progress again. That is, if you are fully honest with me.”

Chapter End Notes

abigail hobbs, daughter extraordinaire.

anyway now's probably as good a time as any to say im on tumblr as @stranded-labyrinth where i post (as of the uploading of this chapter) solely about Hannibal

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

In which Will and Hannibal have their first therapy session during the amnesia.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In an office room, they sat across from each other in individual seats.

Will fidgeted slightly, looking down.

“Does this seem familiar to you, Will?” Hannibal asked.

Will nodded. “Too familiar. I don’t…I don’t like it.”

“You wanted to be introduced to things from your past. I was hoping we could do that here, little by little.”

Will nodded again, looking off at the wall.

“You seem overwhelmed,” Hannibal began. “Tell me, Will. Are you feeling pressured right now?”

“Slightly,” Will admitted. “But we really shouldn’t hold off anymore, should we?”

“No, we shouldn’t,” Hannibal said with a smile. “Let us begin."

Will shuffled uncomfortably in his seat.

Hannibal broached the subject with a steady calmness he hoped Will would appreciate. "Something is clearly bothering you, Will. You confessed to me earlier that you had a nightmare. What was it about?”

Will felt a lump form in his throat before the question was even finished. He didn't even want to ask about what he was thinking, but the way Hannibal was looking at him, already reading him, told him that it was worth something to discuss it.

"...Have I done anything to you, Dr. Lecter?"

Hannibal looked almost amused. "Of course, though I'm afraid you'll need to elaborate further."

Will's eyes had only moved for a split second before he pulled them back to Hannibal's gaze, but it was already too late. Hannibal felt his skin chill.

Will had looked directly at where one of the scars were.

"You believe you have hurt me," Hannibal finally said, breaking the silence.

All Will could do was nod.

"Do you feel ashamed of it?"

"I don't even know what happened, or why…I'm so sorry, Dr. Lecter."

"Will," Hannibal said, his voice slightly softer, "you have a history of near-death experiences, as well as hallucinations and general paranoia. What you did, you did because you felt you had no other choice. I harbor no ill will toward you."

Will felt his entire upper body tighten.

"So you did something to spark it, then. Do *you* feel ashamed of that?"

Hannibal raised his brows. Will seemed shocked at his own words.

"I…I'm sorry, I don't know where that–"

"Do not apologize, Will. Your frustration comes from your memories. This is progress."

Hannibal thought for a moment. "...I do deliberate over that situation often, and wonder if different actions on my part could have allowed for a different outcome. The past shall remain, however, the past. There is nothing I can do, even if I dislike the outcome."

Will swallowed, nodding.

"However," Hannibal continued. "you are not far off in your assessment. I pushed you too far, and you reacted."

Will was afraid to even ask what he had done. He wasn't sure he would be able to handle the answer.

The doe and the buck know the answer, don't they?

"Dr. Lecter?"

"Yes?"

"Was I in jail?"

Hannibal sat up straighter in his seat. "...You were in a hospital for the criminally insane. Normally I wouldn't divulge such shocking information so quickly, but I take it you remember the place if you're remembering such an event."

Hannibal knew what the response would be already, but truly, he could not have predicted how it would make him feel.

"A guy named Matthew," Will said meekly. "He worked there. He had something to do with it."

Hannibal felt his chest tighten, doors inside his memory palace being yanked open with such force they may break off of the hinges.

"Look at what he did to you, Will…What else is he gonna do?"

"Why do you care?"

Will is more tired than defiant. He hasn't forgiven yet. Granted, it just occurred. A sad thought nonetheless.

"What are friends for?"

Will's anger seems to return. He clearly does not enjoy the notion that they are friends.

Thank goodness.

"Look at you two. He's controlling you, Will. Anyone could've told you that, and I think they did. But you don't wanna listen. What is it about him, Will?"

Will just glares at him. How lovely he is in his rage. "You don't have a right to talk about him like that, considering the controlling position you *were in. Who put me in the straightjacket to take me for a walk, Matthew?"*

Matthew laughs. "You're funny. You've always been so funny…Hey, listen…Why don't I do you a favor again?"

Matthew lunges forward, only to be completely halted by Will, who steps in front of you, knife in hand. Your beautiful shield.

"If you take one more fucking step toward him, I'm going to make sure they can't even identify your corpse."

Protective. How sweet. How passionate his fury is.

Matthew looks surprised for a moment, but he grins.

"Wow…He's really got you on a leash, doesn't he? He's always got that gloved hand out, waiting for the hawk to come land on it again. You shouldn't be domesticated, Will. You know that. I know you know that. You're a bird of prey, you need to hunt freely *."*

Matthew glances at you, then back at Will. "...Guess I need to cut the tether then, huh?"

All at once, Matthew begins bolting up the stairs.

No–

You sprint after him, taking the stairs two at a time, going as fast as you possibly can. You cannot allow him to make it to the top.

You cannot allow him near Abigail.

“Dr. Lecter?”

Hannibal blinked, snapping out of his thoughts all at once.

“Are you okay?”

Hannibal met Will’s eyes. Will looked worried.

Worry. Normally it’s so terrible to see him like this, but how sweet of him to worry for you now.

If only you could assure him in sweeter ways.

“Terribly sorry,” Hannibal settled for, “I appear to have gotten lost in my own memories. Something’s in the water, it would seem.”

Will smiled at the joke. That was all Hannibal needed to see.

Hannibal stood. “We should end our session here. I don’t believe venturing into such painful territory all at once would be productive for either of us.”

Will's face flashed with concern again, but he nodded, standing as well.

———

"What happened in there?"

Abigail's voice was riddled with concern as she set two mugs of tea between them. Calming tea for calming discussions had become something she loved to prepare. She had always felt like she was doing far less for this little family than the other two, and figured she should make up for it. While Will and Hannibal definitely had each other, sometimes people needed a listening ear that wasn't specifically their partner. Abigail didn't mind being that listening ear at all.

"Ear, singular," she once joked with Hannibal. Will found it far less funny than he did.

Now was, unfortunately, not a time she could lighten the mood as she usually did.

While Will was out on the balcony, staring at the stars, Hannibal sat at the dining table, silent tears streaking down his face. He had kept his gaze on Will for some time through the glass doors.

How beautiful he is when he sees something beautiful.

Can't he sneak a glance your way? Can't he find you beautiful the way he did before?

"Will is beginning to piece together painful memories," Hannibal explained, taking one of the mugs. "He remembered when Matthew Brown had first made contact with him, and when Will propositioned him. But he cannot remember anything specific. I'm not even sure he remembers that the goal was for me to die."

Abigail nodded, listening closely. It was rare for her to see Hannibal in pain, and she took it with grave seriousness.

"...How are you feeling?" she asked softly.

Hannibal let out a dry, sarcastic laugh. Normally, he would gently tap his ring on the ceramic mug, bringing him a sense of peace knowing why it was there to begin with. He, no longer having that option, remained bitter and resentful of his situation.

"I'm beginning to think the Greeks were completely inane for their idea of Orpheus and Eurydice."

Abigail tilted her head, brow furrowed in confusion. Hannibal sighed, continuing.

"Orpheus was meant to have full faith that Euridyce was following closely behind him. If he were to turn around, he would lose her forever. He was expected to stare straight ahead, marching onward, and expect that everything would be perfect in the end for him and his beloved."

"They say him turning around was his mistake," said Abigail.

"Bullshit," Hannibal hissed.

It shocked Abigail completely.

"Who is a man who doesn't turn around to check on his beloved?" Hannibal said, his voice dangerously low. "Who is a man who believes so blindly and confidently that all will be well, that he cannot even think to look and be sure?"

Who are you for not even turning around that night?

Abigail reached over, gently resting her hand on top of his.

“Human.”

Hannibal sat still for a moment, then at last, he nodded. He could not argue with that.

Suddenly, there was the sound of the door to the balcony as Will stepped inside.

Hannibal, without thinking, immediately looked. Will’s face contorted with worry upon seeing his tears.

“Dr. Lecter…?”

Before Hannibal could respond, Will approached, taking the seat beside him.

Funny how the universe works. It gives Will enough of a sense to know that he wants to take care of you, but he is not allowed to know why.

God is cruel like that.

“I apologize, Will. I believe I ended our session more for my sake than for yours,” Hannibal admitted to him, reaching up and wiping his tears away.

“It’s about what I did to you, isn’t it?”

“No, not so much that…You are gaining glimpses into your past, but you do not have the experience to handle their weight.” Hannibal looked up, meeting Will’s eyes. “I worry what will become of you if you receive more than a glimpse.”

Will shook his head. “Dr. Lecter, whatever happens to me, I’m going to just have to deal with that. I have you to help, but…you can’t cushion my fall. You can only provide the necessary ambulance and exorbitant hospital fees.”

Hannibal laughed, looking down.

How kind of him to lighten the mood. Abigail gets that from him.

“You are absolutely right, Will. Though I hope you’ll understand my concerns.”

Will nodded. “I can’t expect you to be a rigid pillar of impervious realistic philosophy. You’re a person too, y’know.”

Hannibal smiled, meeting his eyes once more.

“...Thank you, Will. You are very generous with your care.”

Will couldn’t help but smile, looking away.

Shy .

It pulled at every string in Hannibal’s heart and begged for Hannibal to take action, to show him just how much he reciprocates.

Hannibal made the wise (yet painful) decision to do nothing, save for sipping his tea.

———

“So that’s what I *think* I saw. I don’t really know all of the constellations off the top of my head.”

The duo nodded along, finishing off their mugs of tea.

Hannibal was the first to stand.

“I’m afraid it is about time for us to retire to bed.”

For the split second before Will had looked away, Hannibal registered anxiety on his face.

“Will? It is not a death sentence, I simply think we should head off to our rooms for the evening.”

Will swallowed.

“I, uh…”

Hannibal and Abigail looked at him expectantly. His throat tightened.

“I keep thinking I’m gonna have another dream like that.”

Hannibal sighed. “That is to be expected, yes.”

“What if I can’t fall a–”

“We could watch a movie,” Abigail interrupted.

Will and Hannibal looked at her.

“I’m serious! I know you have work tomorrow, Hannibal, but Will really needs something to get his mind off of things. He hasn’t had proper entertainment since he lost his memory.”

Will looked up at Hannibal, as if for permission.

Hannibal smiled.

“Of course. Now that you mention it, Abigail, he does seem like an unfortunate animal in an enclosure devoid of enrichment. I do have some duties to perform early tomorrow, but afterward, I can ensure my schedule is clear. Perhaps we could find something to do together then.”

Will and Abigail both smiled, looking at each other excitedly.

“I’d love that,” said Will, looking up at Hannibal again.

Damn those eyes. He could get anything he wanted with those eyes. Feel blessed that it is something so easily attainable that he wants.

———

“What does he even do? He never actually told me.”

Abigail laughed. “Museum curator, sort of. A very specific display of historical torture devices.”

“Oh…isn’t that *lovely* .”

She laughed again. Abigail sat on the floor, back pressed to the couch, while Will sat on the other end of the couch, wrapped in two heavy blankets, eyes glued to the TV. It was embedded in the wall, surrounded by gorgeous carvings in the wood, and an electric fireplace that worked as a heater.

“It may be an antique city, but we are not in the middle ages anymore,” Hannibal had said before going off to bed. Will now wondered if Hannibal had more of an obsession with the middle ages than he let on, considering the display curation bit. Maybe he was just an avid history fan, who knows.

The movie itself was Abigail’s suggestion. Something about a murderer in a ghost mask trying to hunt down one specific girl.

Will shook off the feeling that the techniques used were impractical. It was entertainment, not a crime documentary.

It was difficult to shake the feeling that he could do better.

The main character was trying to suggest that a killer was on her tail. Other characters seemed content to believe she was either lying or crazy.

The familiar, nauseating feeling was also quite difficult for Will to ignore.

The familiarity had begun when the killer called a girl's home right at the start of the film. The familiarity continued when the main girl was struggling to find peace, knowing a killer was at large that she had personal experience with, but nobody believed her.

The feeling gripped his stomach and tightened his chest. He was shocked that he hadn't found it difficult to focus on the movie.

Eventually, however, sleep found him.

He vaguely heard the reveal of two men killing together. If he was more awake, the fuzzy feeling it gave him would have left him disturbed.

___

*[**REDACTED**] takes the stairs two at a time. What are you two running from? Or are you running toward something?*

There's a shrill scream. A young woman. A teenager?

Abigail .

He caught her. He finally caught her. He was going to get what he wanted.

He was going to sever the tether.

*You sprint up the stairs, bypassing [**REACTED**] completely. You can't let Matthew succeed.*

You will not be his, and Abigail will not be his victim.

Just as loud as the scream itself comes the shattering of glass.

By the time you two make it up the stairs, there Abigail stands, shaking, horrified, hands pushed outward, in front of a broken window.

You freeze completely.

Abigail. It wasn't a hallucination. You didn't mistake someone else's voice for hers. It was really her. Alive and well, right there before you.

Before anything else, you hug her. You hug her tightly. She hugs back, sobbing and trembling, her terror not yet worn off.

"It's okay, it's okay– He's gone now. He can't hurt you. He's not gonna hurt you."

"You're safe, Abigail."

"You're safe."

"You're alive."

Will flinched hard, shaking himself out of his slumber. The sun was shining in through the glass panes of the balcony door, the TV long having been shut off. He was still on the couch, still in his blankets, having fallen asleep.

Will looked to where Abigail had been the night before. She was gone.

Will's mind assumed the worst immediately.

He took her, he finally got to her. He found a way. He's gonna take you away next.

It was paranoia. He knew it was. It made no sense, and yet it gripped at his chest and demanded his attention. Will sank into the blankets, wrapping himself tightly, sobbing where no one could see him.

Chapter End Notes

thus concludes the chapters i wrote before actually posting anything. if i'm to update this, i'll have to actually write again. pray for me LOL, i get so unmotivated so quickly.

which sucks, because the next chapter is where shit hits the fan

once again, come find me at @stranded-labyrinth on tumblr!

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Will gets to go outside for the first time since he woke up. Hannibal and Abigail accompany him, anxious of what could happen if he was left in public alone in his current state. Neither could predict what would follow.

Chapter Notes

please be warned, this is the heaviest chapter yet, since this one is the reason for the "Blood & Gore" tag. stay safe!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will was discovered in a cocoon of blankets when Abigail entered the room.

“Will? You alive under there?”

Will just groaned in response. He wasn’t sure if it was the awful sleep he got, or the fact that he had remained curled up for so long, but his body felt like he got hit by several large vehicles. After a failed attempt to stretch under the pile of blankets, he finally peeked his head out.

Abigail instantly looked worried. “Oh– Oh god…”

Will’s eyes were still puffy, his face red. Overall, he looked…sad.

Abigail came over, sitting on the couch beside him. “Will, what happened?”

He rubbed his eyes, sighing. “Nothing, it’s just another stupid nightmare…God, I feel like a kid, waking up thinking it’s real.”

“Do you always infantilize your emotions?”

Will blinked, looking over at her. “...You spend way too much time with Dr. Lecter.”

Abigail laughed. “Maybe that’s why I don’t infantilize my emotions.”

Ignoring how Will rolled his eyes, she stood.

“Come on. You need to get cleaned up for today, and I need to show you how to use all those hair products again, because your head looks like you got attacked by a squirrel.”

Will shrank a bit, feeling through his curls. They were tangled and frizzy, which is what he was used to, but–

“Was it really so different before?” he asked her.

“Oh yeah. Once Hannibal got you all that stuff, your curls looked *so* much healthier.”

Will paused for a moment.

“...Hannibal bought me stuff?”

Abigail momentarily panicked, realizing she may have said too much, and tried to save it.

“Well he’s the only one making money out of us three, so yeah.”

Will nodded, realizing that made much more sense. Abigail internally sighed a breath of relief.

“Alright, now get out of your little mound. We have work to do.”

——

“Alright, now hang your head down.”

“What? Why?”

“I gotta diffuse them with your head upside down.”

“Diffuse?”

“Just swing your head down.”

Will did as he was told, sitting in a chair across from Abigail in a robe, hair still sopping wet. He didn’t understand a thing she was doing, but he didn’t have much of a choice but to trust her. It was just hair after all, what was the harm in it?

Granted, it had been a bit overwhelming. First she made sure his hair was soaking wet, then there was the struggle of detangling it all, though she tried to make that as painless as she could. Then came whatever oil she put on her hands, running her fingers through his curls. Some kind of spray came next. She claimed it was a heat protectant, not that he would know whether or not it actually helped. Then came the copious amounts of mousse that made him

almost certain his hair was going to feel sticky for the rest of the day, but Abigail assured him that it wouldn't because of how soaked his hair was. That made just about zero sense to him, but he chose to trust her on this.

And now came some terrifying looking extension to the hairdryer in her hand, pressing his curls upward against his scalp. Will just hoped that this grueling process would end up being even remotely worth it.

He still had to figure out what the hell he was going to wear. Where even were his clothes?

———

Hannibal opened the door to the penthouse, stepping inside.

He removed his suit jacket, resting it on the back of a chair. He looked around, currently unable to catch any sight of either of the two.

"Hannibal? That you?"

"No, Abigail, a stranger has broken in. Your vigilance is poor."

Abigail stepped out, rolling her eyes. "You need to work on your jokes. You sound like a robot."

Hannibal smiled at her, then looked over her shoulder at the doorways behind her. "Where's Will?"

"Still getting ready. He'll be out soon. I had to grab some clothes for him from your drawers, since you haven't thought to switch them to the guest room yet."

“Wonderful,” Hannibal replied. If he felt embarrassed, or anything really, from discovering his mistake, he didn’t show it.

Internally, he cursed himself for the error. What would Will have said if he discovered his clothes were entirely in Hannibal’s room? He’d have to correct that later.

He made his way to the kitchen behind the long counter that divided the room. “Shall we pack anything to snack on? I can’t imagine we will be gone horribly long, but Will may wish to–”

“Ready whenever you guys are.”

Hannibal turned around, and his heart nearly dropped into his pristine shoes.

There Will stood. The Will that he knew. His curls were almost expertly cared for, he wore a salmon dress shirt and black slacks, and…

Ah. He still glanced more at the floor than at Hannibal. His full confidence was not present, not in the way it was before.

The difference did not help. This man still looked like his husband. He dressed like his husband, he acted like his husband, he *was* his husband. And yet Will was none the wiser.

Oh how he would laugh if he knew how he was affecting you now. You’d give anything to hear that laugh again.

Hannibal forced a smile. He hoped it didn’t seem so.

“Food for the road, Will?”

Will shook his head. “Not really hungry…just wanna get some air for a change.”

Hannibal nodded. “Very well. There are plenty of places to eat outside should you change your mind.”

Hannibal opted to ignore the harsh twinge in his chest at the thought of Will refusing his cooking, but accepting that of a stranger.

____

Abigail internally sighed a breath of relief.

They had made it at least partially through their journey outdoors, though it was still in a very urban area, and Will already seemed to be doing so much better.

Will tilted his head up slightly when a breeze would come through, allowing it to caress every part of his face and neck that had felt overheated for far too long in his illness and recovery. He smiled at people on the street– Classic American, but some smiled back, recognizing him.

Hannibal, however, kept a firm hand on Will’s elbow for the duration of their walk.

He wouldn’t say so aloud, as to not cause Will to think he was questioning his decision-making abilities, but Hannibal was anxious. Will knew nothing of this area, nothing of the life they had built together, and he was out in public surrounded by all of it. The last thing Hannibal needed was to temporarily lose him in a crowd, or God forbid permanently lose him.

Will turned to Hannibal, brows knitted. “Uh– Hannibal? You okay?”

Only then did Hannibal realize he had tightened his grip on Will's arm. He loosened his grasp, opting to let go altogether after a moment, holding his hands together behind him, though he gripped his own wrist rather harshly.

“I apologize, Will. I was lost in thought.”

Will gave a bit of a sympathetic smile, looking ahead again as they continued on their way.

He knows you’re lying. Well, you're not lying, per-se. Regardless, he knows you are not telling him the full truth. He always knows that, whether he remembers you or not.

Finally, they came to a park. It suited Will much better than the bumbling urban crowds of the streets they had been on, and his face seemed to reflect it. Granted, the place was still filled with people, but much less densely packed than before.

Hannibal allowed himself to relax, taking in the greenery around them, the cool breeze of the day, and the way the sunlight shone through the leaves of trees.

Abigail smiled, her attention turned to Hannibal. She hadn’t seen him relaxed in quite some time. She had missed it dearly. Hannibal looked at her, noticing her gaze and returning it with a fond smile.

She looked to Will–

Will?

Abigail’s face dropped. “Hannibal. Hannibal, where’s Will?”

Hannibal stopped abruptly, turning toward where Will had been.

His expression refused to budge, but his heart rate quickened.

He looked around, doing his best to spot that salmon dress shirt. He couldn’t raise any alarms, especially not in public. Nobody could know of Will’s condition, that was far too easy to take advantage of–

"Roman Fell!"

Hannibal turned around, hearing the familiar voice of a woman who had attended one of his lectures. He would recognize her anywhere at this point. She was a sweet old lady, truly, a high class woman who could pass as anybody's grandmother in this city, and she played the part well. The last time Hannibal had seen her, she was trying to convince Will to take some of the candy she kept in her bag.

Hannibal gave her a smile, despite feeling awfully pressed for time.

"Hello again. You were the one trying to give Lyle mints, weren't you?"

She laughed, waving her hand. "Guilty as charged!"

She looked around, suddenly seeming less pleased.

"Where is Lyle, anyhow? You've been hiding him from us, Dr. Fell!"

"Ah, you see–"

"Such a cute little face he has! And yet he hardly shows up anymore!"

"He was out with us just today, but I seem to have lost sight of him, if you would allow me to–"

The sound of the woman's squeal interrupted him. "There he is! Oh my, look what he's found!"

Hannibal turned around, relieved at first, though the sight most certainly stunned him.

Will stood there, holding–

...Of course. A dog.

"I, uh, I saw him by himself. He doesn't have a collar, but he's definitely used to people."

Before Hannibal could even reply, the woman beside him went right up to Will and the dog.

"Lovely to see you again, Lyle! And why *hello* , young man!" She pet the dog excitedly, allowing it to lick her face.

Will glanced at Hannibal, then forced a polite smile. "Hello again...How long's it been?"

"Three weeks!"

"Oh wow– Yeah, time sure does go by. Sorry about that, I was, uh...I got really sick."

She gasped, placing her hand over her heart. "Oh, you poor thing...How sweet of Roman here to take you out for some fresh air."

Will laughed a bit, though that was also forced. He seemed to be playing the part relatively well nonetheless. "Yeah, he's, uh, he's sweet."

Will stepped around her, walking toward Hannibal.

"He doesn't have anywhere else to do, it seems. Can we bring him home...honey?"

Hannibal wanted to object, he truly did. But the lady beside them fawned over Will for good reason.

Damn the way those eyes get him anything he wants. How fortunate for him that these folk find his awkwardness endearing.

Hannibal gave a soft smile.

"Yes, of course, darling."

Will was playing a part, sure, but Hannibal knew for certain that he saw Will's eyes light up.

———

Hannibal sat in the dining room, hands folded tightly together on the table.

Abigail came to sit beside him. She didn’t meet his gaze.

In the other room, watery sounds could be heard, along with the sound of Will talking to the dog as though it were a person.

“...Did he talk like that with his dogs back home?” Abigail asked, breaking the silence.

“I don’t know,” Hannibal admitted. “I imagine he did.”

Another silence fell between them. Finally, Abigail lifted her hand, gently setting it atop Hannibal’s folded hands.

“I know you were scared today,” she said. “I was, too.”

Hannibal remained silent for a moment longer, as if to decide on what to say.

“...I don’t know what I would have done if we lost him today,” Hannibal said at last. “Anything could have happened to him.”

Abigail nodded, looking away. After a few more silent moments, Hannibal finally shifted his hands, keeping one flat on the table, using his left to intertwine his fingers with hers, gently squeezing her hand.

She looked up at him again. “Do you think he would’ve come back? If he was attacked?”

“How do you mean?”

“Like…The way he was before?”

Hannibal took a deep breath, lifting his head. “I certainly hope we are not obligated to find out.”

———

Will remained curled on his bed, slightly miffed that the dog had chosen to spend the night in Abigail's room instead of his, which Hannibal had found greatly amusing.

After everything you've done for him already. You even bathed him, the ungrateful little shit , Will mentally joked with himself.

It was difficult to lighten his mood. He had the gut feeling that he had worried both Hannibal and Abigail by separating from them outside.

Of course you worried them. You can't remember a damn thing about this place. Would you feel perfectly fine if someone you cared about with severe memory loss wandered off in public? They've been trying to keep an eye on you, and you take off without warning because you saw a stray dog.

In Will's defense, the dog rolled over for him as soon as he approached.

Will moved to lay flat on his back. He just couldn't get comfortable tonight. Aside from the guilt of worrying the other two, despite their best efforts to conceal it, he almost felt as if he had been being…

Watched.

Will sat up, his head turning toward the door.

Someone was out there.

He carefully got out of bed, doing his best to make as little noise as possible. He opened the door slowly, creeping his way into the hall and into the main room.

He looked around. Nothing. Huh. That was–

“Thought I’d find you here.”

Every hair on Will’s body stood on end. He turned toward the darkened kitchen, where the man had been lurking about.

“...I know you,” Will said, having to force the words through his tightening throat.

“I would hope so,” the man said with a smile. “Your little girl almost killed me. Bones take a while to heal, y’know. But the BSCHI is easier to escape than anyone in the state would feel comfortable knowing. Especially if you know your way around.”

Will swallowed hard, taking a step back.

“How did you find us?”

“It was easy, really,” the man replied, starting to move around the area a bit. Like a predator on the hunt, only he expected Will to somehow feel safe with him. “Just look where other killers have been before. A man like Hannibal Lecter didn’t just start when he moved to America.”

Will blinked. This guy was insane. Whoever he was, whatever happened before, this man was *crazy*. And he was dangerous.

“Matthew,” he said, remembering the name, “you need to go.”

Matthew tilted his head, still grinning. “Aw, Will. Don’t be like that. I came all this way to save you from this hell. A gilded prison is still a prison, y’know.”

Matthew lifted his arms, causing Will to flinch. “You need to fly…Fly like the bird of prey you are, sweetheart.”

“Don’t call me that,” Will said, his voice far sharper than he knew he had any confidence for.

Matthew just laughed. “Oh, God, Will…They’re still poisoning your head, aren’t they?”

...No.

“Damn…I would’ve thought you’d break free by now, Will.”

No. Don’t.

“Guess there’s still a tether to cut.”

Matthew began moving toward–

No.

Down the hall.

No, wait–!

Abigail’s room.

No.

Will couldn't think anymore. He had no control anymore. Everything was instinct, including the flash of a concept in his head that he couldn't name.

He stormed forward, grabbing a knife from the kitchen counter on his way.

Matthew barely had time to turn around.

Will grabbed the collar of Matthew's jacket, plunging the knife into his shoulder. He ripped it out with an equal amount of force, swinging it down into the same shoulder again.

Matthew cried out, trying to grab Will's wrist, but he was only able to successfully grab the one holding onto his jacket. Matthew tried to get away, but all he could manage was to escape the jacket and fall backward onto the cold, hard floor.

Will descended onto him in an instant, the jacket tossed aside.

Matthew put his arms up, trying to block the blows. Will's knife slashed through his arms, slicing through skin and muscle until it hit bone. This repeated every time Matthew made a failed attempt to stop the stabbing. His head turned each way and jerked around as Matthew tried to squeeze his eyes shut to prevent more blood from pouring into them as his own blood covered his face. Muscle was stabbed through and sliced through until at least one of Matthew's arms was completely useless.

Will continued regardless.

He plunged the knife into Matthew's stomach until he felt his own shoulder screaming from the effort. Even then, he didn't stop. Matthew was coughing up blood and gasping for air until the blood went into his lungs. Will's knife tore through outer tissue until it hit organs. He even felt the sudden jolt in his swing of his knife hitting bone.

By the time Will was pulled off of him, Matthew was nothing but a gurgling pile of flesh on the floor, spending his final moments in agony.

As soon as Will was off of him, he burst into loud sobs, dropping the knife to the floor.

He felt a pair of strong arms around him, encasing him in warmth. Whatever was being whispered into his hair as his back was rubbed in soothing circles, he didn't hear it. His ears were ringing as his sobs echoed throughout the room. The way his voice was wrecked already told him that he had been screaming through the entire ordeal. Whether he was screaming words or not, he had no idea.

His hearing finally returned as he saw Abigail's door open, the sound of a dog's terrified whining coming from inside.

"Abigail–" he managed to sob out, his voice just barely allowing him to do that.

"Will!" she yelled out, rushing over immediately. "Oh my God, Will–"

As soon as she knelt down in front of him, he pulled away from Hannibal, reaching out and pulling her into his arms. He sobbed into her shoulder as she wrapped her arms around him in return.

"Oh God, Abigail…" he said, muffled into her shoulder. "I'm so sorry…H–He was gonna kill you…"

Will finally brought himself to look up, almost vomiting at the sight of the mangled corpse on the floor. "O–oh God…Is he gonna be–?"

"Will, forget about him. Are *you* okay?" Abigail asked, putting her hands on his shoulders.

He looked at her in disbelief for a moment, reality beginning to come back to him. He opted to just nod, but there were still tears pouring down his face.

He felt a warm hand on his back.

“I’m so sorry you had to deal with this alone, Will,” Hannibal said soothingly. “I promise you, we will take care of it.”

Before he knew it, Will was being lifted off of the ground. Hannibal carried him in the direction of the bathroom, and Will looked over Hannibal’s shoulder to see Abigail beginning to drag the body away.

Will became acutely aware of just how much blood he was covered in. He felt dizzy instantly.

“Stay with me, Will,” Hannibal asked gently, setting him down on the bathroom floor. “Can you get your clothes off on your own?”

Will nodded, swallowing. He pulled off his shirt, his vertigo beginning to lessen.

Will had zoned out completely, his attention not coming back until he was in a warm bath already, the water a light red. He was clinging to Hannibal’s arm, sobbing, as if the man might leave if he didn’t hold on.

Hannibal used his free hand to gently scrub the blood off of Will’s body, whispering soothing words that Will didn’t have the headspace to understand. Or maybe the words weren’t English. Will had a feeling that, at some point in his life, he understood them anyway. Why couldn’t he now? It wasn’t fair.

All at once, Will remembered the concept that had momentarily come to mind before he had brutally murdered the man that broke into their home.

Daughter .

If his body wasn't already wracked with sobs before, it was now. Now he knew what he had been screaming.

"Don't touch my fucking daughter".

Chapter End Notes

i finally got around to writing it. huzzah! i figured if i didn't post it when i was done, it would be doomed to the same editing and nitpicking loop the other chapters were subjected to.

let me know your thoughts, and as always, feel free to come find me on tumblr :]

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Will grapples with killing Matthew, and starts to demand more information from Hannibal.

Chapter Notes

it's alive! yes, i've decided to update this at last. i finally got the motivation to do so out of nowhere. i hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Everything felt eerily silent afterwards.

This place was never meant to be silent, it seemed. It was always bustling with something, be it conversation or food sizzling in a pan, or the screams of the man who broke into their home being stabbed to death.

Will couldn’t get the screams out of his head, nor could he forget his own.

He didn’t know how long he’d been sitting on the couch, wrapped in a blanket that Hannibal had draped over his shoulders. He couldn’t remember how he’d even gotten dry after the bath. Perhaps he simply wasn’t paying attention. Perhaps he’d dissociated. He wasn’t sure which felt scarier.

The only time he was pulled from his thoughts was by the feeling of the couch cushion beside him sinking with weight, and being vaguely aware of something being handed to him.

Will took the teacup, finally allowing his eyes to focus on the room as he looked beside him at Hannibal.

“Chamomile,” Hannibal explained. “I thought you may like something to ease you to sleep tonight.”

“I doubt I’ll sleep regardless,” Will muttered, though he took a sip nonetheless. The tea was still steaming, and he felt it burn his lip and his tongue, but he didn’t care. Anything to ground him in reality. Anything to end the screams in his head.

Moments passed in silence, Hannibal offering his presence while Will sipped at his tea. Finally, Will couldn’t stand it, and he looked at him once more.

“You should be more freaked out.”

“My job dictates that I am not,” Hannibal replied.

“Not freaked out by seeing a murder because you’re a psychiatrist?”

“No,” Hannibal said. “I meant that my job is to care for you, as well as for Abigail. You are my priority, Will. Anything else will have to wait.”

Will nodded. He felt like he should argue. He chose not to.

He flinched slightly when he felt something cold press against his leg, only to look down and see the fuzzy face of a German Shepherd, its tail wagging slightly when it was acknowledged.

Will allowed himself to smile then, reaching a hand down to pat his head. “Hey, big guy…”

Hannibal smiled now as well, relieved that Will was no longer stuck in his own head. “Have you given him a name yet, Will?”

Will furrowed his brows a bit, thinking. “I don’t know…haven’t thought of one yet.” He looked over at Hannibal. “What would you name him?”

“Me?” Hannibal asked, slightly surprised. He turned his attention to the dog, who was softly panting with a little doggy smile now. “...Apollo.”

“Apollo?” Will asked, seeming at least slightly amused. “Apollo…” He looked down at the dog. “You like Apollo, big guy?”

“I’m sure he will give you a thoroughly detailed answer, Will.”

Will laughed, though immediately yawned, taking another sip of his tea. “Fuck…you might’ve been right about the chamomile.”

“I would hope so. You need rest, Will, especially after everything that’s happened today.”

Will nodded, sipping until the cup was empty. Hannibal gently took the cup from him, carrying it to the kitchen. Apollo hopped up on the couch immediately, taking Hannibal’s warm spot and curling up, his head resting against Will’s leg.

Will didn’t know how long it took him to fall asleep.

———

Yells became weak grunts, which became silence.

The two slashed at him, his body beginning to go limp in the seat as he could no longer fight back. There was still life in him, however.

Jack was always a fighter.

Hannibal's slashes were precise, planned. He knew where he wanted the knife to go. Will's were erratic, wild. He was caught up in the exhilaration, not at all paying attention.

Will's hand got in the way.

He nearly screamed, but it sounded more like a cry.

"HANNIBAL!"

His tone was piercing, scolding, cold *as he dropped his own knife and pulled away. He gripped his wrist with his uninjured hand, processing the pain, looking at the gash he'd just received.*

It had been entirely an accident, but Hannibal's face dropped regardless. Will had never shouted at him like that before. The emotion it brought out of him was inexplicable, as though he was shot back to their sessions weeks ago, having to defend himself against Will's harsh accusations. It made him want to plead, to defend, "No, it was an accident, I would never want to hurt you, please believe me."

But he didn't. He remained dead silent, trying to process what had just happened. His processing ended when he saw blood gushing from Will's hand that was most certainly not Jack Crawford's.

"Will–" he began, unsure how his sentence would even end. Hannibal placed his knife on the table, making his way to Will's side. "Let me see–"

Will pulled his hand away, still reeling from it. "No. You've done enough."

He could see the look on Hannibal's face in the corner of his eye. Ouch. Will cursed under his breath, definitely aimed at his injury.

"...Sorry...You know I don't do well with pain."

Hannibal nodded, seeming somewhat less shaken by Will's attitude. "Are you alright, Will?"

Will turned to Jack Crawford instead of answering. "...Is he dead yet?"

Will's gaze was met with the glazed over eyes of his once living friend.

———

Will sat up in a cold sweat, panting, as if no amount of air could properly fill his lungs.

The intruder was meant to be an exception. A kill of self-defense. Defense of a third person, more like. That's what Hannibal had been assuring him as he bathed the blood off of him the night before, as Abigail–

Where was Abigail?

Will was shaking now, his body not allowing him to breathe properly. Apollo whined softly beside him, pawing at him to get his attention, trying to see if his new owner was alright when he most definitely was not.

The realization was one of the ugliest in the world. Even if his dreams were only muddled bits of memories slammed together, as he knew them to be, there was something in there that

was true. Something disgusting, something utterly mortifying in a way he wasn't sure he would ever be able to phrase aloud to anyone.

Will had killed before. The intruder was not his first.

———

The room was unbearably quiet.

The same office room from before, in which Hannibal had insisted they could openly discuss anything kicking around Will's head.

Despite that, Will remained silent.

"Something on your mind, Will?" Hannibal finally asked to break the silence.

With the look he was given, he put his hands up in surrender. "I apologize, I merely didn't want to insist upon discussing matters that discomfort you."

"Discomfort," Will repeated with a wry laugh, leaning his elbow on the armrest as he rubbed at his face. " *Discomfort* . What a way to put it."

"Is there another way you'd like to put it?"

Will looked at him then. That was all he did. Just looked. His expression was difficult to read, but it was…hardened. Stony. He was deeply unhappy, perhaps even frustrated. It felt directed at Hannibal. And yet, Will couldn't take his eyes off of him.

“I don’t wanna kill you anymore, Dr. Lecter. Not now that I finally find you interesting.”

Hannibal swallowed. It was a minute thing, but unfortunately for him, he was sure Will noticed.

“Dr. Lecter,” Will began, “I need you to tell me everything that happened with Matthew Brown.”

It was as though someone had placed a crushing weight on his chest. Hannibal was being stoned to death, gradually, but he no longer knew who was performing the cruel act.

It would not be worth it to keep the events from Will. His memories were coming back, about as inconveniently as they possibly could. Hannibal couldn’t risk Will developing a lack of trust in him. Not now, not ever.

There was no more hiding it. There was nothing else he could do.

“It was about a year ago,” Hannibal explained, already internally wincing. It had felt like so much longer than that. “You had been incarcerated for some time. You were accused of multiple murders you did not commit. Only, your stance throughout your time at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane remained that you believed I was the one responsible. It was an idea that, as unfortunate as it was, made a degree of sense. Someone had planted evidence on you, and I had been around you more than anyone.

“While you did not have many friends, I would argue you had at least one aside from myself: Agent Katz. She was kinder to you than most, and she was willing to some degree to listen to you at that time. However, somewhere along the way, she had been murdered. You believed that that was my doing as well.”

Will was staring at him with more intensity than he had since those sessions so long ago. There was no more frustration, thank God, but that was all it could be described as. Intensity.

Hannibal took a breath. “You sought to rectify the problem.”

Will swallowed then, hard, as he blinked. For the first time since Hannibal began speaking, Will seemed uneasy.

“...I sent him after you,” Will filled in.

Hannibal nodded. “That you did. And he adored you for it.”

Will sucked a breath in, sharply. “He was a killer already.”

“Yes,” Hannibal answered. “As well as an orderly at the–”

“I know,” Will interrupted, looking away.

Hannibal gazed at him solemnly, allowing a moment to pass before asking, “What do you remember, Will?”

“I remember some kind of cage,” Will said, rubbing at his face again. “He…unlocked it. He was talking to me, something about…hawks and hunting. How being solitary was their weakness. He led me somewhere…then…”

He took a shaky breath. “I just remember him saying, ‘Anything for a friend’.”

Hannibal, for once, didn’t know how to respond. Will looked at him again, a far more desperate note in his eyes.

“What does that mean?” Will asked, practically begging in a hushed tone. “I just– I just sicced some killer on you? And he thought we were friends? So he– He shows up to your

house and–”

His ramblings became increasingly difficult to continue around the lump in his throat. His eyes were visibly welling with tears at that point.

“Will,” Hannibal said, moving to the edge of his seat and speaking in as calm of a tone as he could. “You were in a vulnerable position. Your feelings of betrayal and anguish consumed you. Matthew Brown preyed on those feelings and forced himself into your life, masquerading as a friend, up until the day you turned down his offer.”

Will pressed his palms to his eyes, trying to take in deeper breaths to calm himself down.

“I butchered him,” he whispered.

“You are human, Will,” Hannibal assured. “Human beings can only take so much before they break. That man was a large source of trauma in your life. Not only that, but he fully planned to kill Abigail. You reacted accordingly.”

Will pulled his hands away then, his brows furrowing above his widened eyes. Hannibal frowned.

What is it now, beloved?

“Abigail…” Will repeated to himself, looking up at Hannibal again. “What…is she to me?”

“A friend.”

“Bullshit,” Will hissed.

Hannibal, admittedly, was caught off-guard by the reaction, but he supposed he shouldn't have been. He took a breath, ready to answer, when Will snapped again.

"How many people have I killed, Dr. Lecter?"

Hannibal gazed at him, as if searching for something before he could reply. "...What do you remember, Will?"

"You first," Will said, his voice hushed, but his tone dangerous. There was a type of fury in his eyes, and Hannibal knew very well that it was directed at him.

Hannibal sighed.

"You remember your time in law enforcement," Hannibal stated. "Abigail was someone you came into contact with on the job. You were investigating her father's murders, all of young women who looked like her."

Will's expression scarcely faltered, though the minute shifting showed pain replacing rage.

"...I killed her father," he said, his voice still low.

"You did," Hannibal replied, "after he attempted to kill her. After he had already killed his wife in front of you."

Will leaned back in his seat, staring at the ceiling in harsh disbelief.

"So I'm a vigilante," he said, his voice dripping with a sort of sardonic venom that was now directed at himself.

“I would consider you more of a monster slayer,” Hannibal said, his tone perhaps too lighthearted for the conversation. “You have never killed without perfectly adequate reason. Firing rounds into a man who was actively attempting murder, or slaughtering a man who intended to slaughter us.”

Or ridding himself of those who corrupt his life, but he need not know about those instances yet.

Will huffed, wiping his eyes at last. “I doubt Abigail thinks so.”

“She very much does,” Hannibal corrected him. “I will remind you that her father was actively attempting to end her life when you ended his.”

“So she traded one killer for another,” Will said, his tone sounding more defeated than anything.

“She traded a father who was willing to sacrifice her for a father who would sooner sacrifice himself,” Hannibal said firmly. “What child would not feel safer with a father like you? What good father would not protect his daughter?”

Will’s breathing returned to normal at last, though he remained staring at the ceiling. Hannibal allowed silence to fall between them, allowing Will to process the entire situation. He deserved as much.

Though you wish you could give him more without him hating you.

Again.

“I don’t feel any less disturbed by it,” Will said at last. “Or disgusted with myself.”

“That is to be expected, unfortunately.”

“Is it–” Will began, cutting himself off with a sigh. “Is it… *normal* to feel kinda glad about it, though? Like…Abigail is safe now. I can’t help but be grateful that the guy’s dead.”

“It was almost poetic justice,” Hannibal supplies.

Will huffs a laugh. “Yeah…I guess it was poetic in a way.”

“You can appreciate the art of it. The fury of a protective father has been portrayed throughout human history. There’s no need to end that now.”

Will did not reply, he simply nodded.

Hannibal took that as agreement.

It was not.

——

The session ended soon after. Hannibal, among many things, was relieved by the end. He had feared that this kill would haunt his amnesia-ridden lover, causing him to damn himself until they could somehow rediscover his mind as it was before. He was grateful now that they could discuss these matters more openly, without having to hide as much for the sake of Will not discovering something so shocking out of nowhere.

Will was far less optimistic, back in his guest room.

Everything from the past few days gathered in his mind, details turning over one another like pieces of a puzzle he was forbidden from solving.

“What you did, you did because you felt you had no other choice. I harbor no ill will toward you.”

“I do deliberate over that situation often, and wonder if different actions on my part could have allowed for a different outcome. The past shall remain, however, the past. There is nothing I can do, even if I dislike the outcome."

"You are not far off in your assessment. I pushed you too far, and you reacted."

Will closed his eyes as he lay on his bed, breathing deep.

“How many people have I killed, Dr. Lecter?”

“What do you remember, Will?”

Avoiding the subject. Dodging the question. Only explaining what Will asked for specifically.

Justifying revenge killing. Elevating murder to art.

By the end of the session, Will had been convinced of what he only fractionally suspected before. Hannibal was hiding something from him, something large enough to make him dance around the topic any time Will had gotten close to discovering it.

Will remembered his dream from the night before, and his entire being seemed to tense.

Only then did he hear the sounds of Abigail returning home, and he realized that he had no idea where she had been, nor what became of Matthew Brown's corpse after she dragged it away.

———

His shoes crunched against the gravel, slowly, as he stepped. He could feel bile in his throat, though he swallowed it down and kept moving, staring at the sight before him.

He hadn't seen anything like this in years.

The corpse, beyond its various stab wounds that had lended to the idea that someone nearly attempted to butcher the man, was wrapped in plant vines and chains. The body was positioned against a large rock, bound to it by these very chains, the plants serving as decor more than anything. Every object around the rock was knocked over, the ground underneath the rock cracked and broken.

A younger detective stepped forward, standing beside Pazzi.

"You were on the *Il Mostro di Firenze* case, weren't you?" the young man asked in Italian.

Pazzi turned to him then, giving nothing but a grave nod.

"He used to position bodies like paintings, didn't he? Classical things?" the young detective asked again.

Another solemn nod.

"So this is Loki then."

Pazzi turned to him, brows furrowed. “What?”

“This killer is finding inspiration in a killer who depicted artwork of gods, right?” the detective asked. “So this is Loki bound to the rock. You can even see where they tried to depict an earthquake because he–”

“It is Pirithous.”

“...What?”

“ *Il Mostro* does not do Norse gods. He favors the works of the Greeks or the Romans.”

The young detective frowned, gazing at the scene again. “...So who was Pirithous?”

“Closest friend of Theseus. The two had aimed to take their brides together, with Theseus targeting Helen of Troy, and Pirithous aiming for Persephone. They were bound in the Underworld for the crime of attempting to take a god’s wife for a bride. Theseus was allowed to be released, but Pirithous was doomed to remain. The Earth shook when Heracles attempted to remove Pirithous. That is the earthquake you speak of.”

The young detective nodded, gazing around the scene. “So whoever this man is, he went after someone’s Persephone?”

Pazzi nodded, his mouth twisting into a frown.

“Which means there is a Hades for us to find,” he replied.

Chapter End Notes

what sort of Florence fic would it be without Rinaldo Pazzi?

thank you for reading!

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Hannibal decides to leave Will a gift in the hopes of jogging his memory.

Chapter Notes

hello again!

please note the slightly adjusted tags (right at the end of them, currently). the creepiness won't last long, and it will be swiftly dealt with, but it's there.

otherwise, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He sighed, standing upright. As much as he adored these glass displays and how they protected the historical artifacts contained within them, he couldn’t stand how easily they accumulated dust in this room.

Hannibal wasn’t one to feel loneliness often, not before he’d met Will. But once that darling man had entered his life, Hannibal found out the hard way how true loneliness could feel. It was one of God’s cruel tricks, reminding him that he was, in fact, a man after all. A human amongst humans, and one who craved passion just like anyone else.

He never thought he’d be reduced to that again, not after they came here together. Not after he had Will at long last.

Will was making progress, certainly, but it was dangerous nonetheless. Hannibal could never predict him entirely, and he proved that time and time again. Memories were flooding back to the poor boy, things that he didn’t entirely understand, things that scared him. It was only a matter of time before he realized what Hannibal was all over again, without memories of their closeness to accompany it.

And yet…

Something was blooming within Will. That desire to slaughter was making its return in the form of killing to protect Abigail. That was how it all began. Will's first conscious kill, in the form of taking the life of Garett Jacob Hobbs. His conflicting feelings were exactly as they were back then: He was glad he protected her, he was ashamed that he was glad the man was dead. He was internally punishing himself for his desires, despite relishing in the outcome.

The only difference now was that there was no investigation for him to be part of, no killer for him to empathize with. There was only himself.

How awfully lonely that must be for him.

Hannibal could not allow that. Not when they were both suffering such drastically different kinds of loneliness, all caused by the exact same thing.

Hannibal walked the length of the room, observing the artifacts once more. He remembered when he'd first brought Will here, how fascinated his dear boy was by everything the room contained.

He smiled at the memory.

"What's that one do?" Will had asked, gesturing to a display case.

"That is a starvation cage," Hannibal explained. "Someone would be locked inside and simply left there to slowly die."

"Jesus," Will said with a nervous laugh. "That must be the worst one for you."

“How so?”

“You don’t take well to the idea of hunger,” Will joked.

Hannibal huffed a soft laugh, placing his hand on the small of Will’s back as he guided him around the room. “What others in this room catch your eye?”

Will looked around, his eyes finally locking onto a wooden contraption. “What’s that one?”

“Ah, the Spanish donkey, I believe it’s called in English,” Hannibal explained. “A wooden structure with a sharp wedge at the top. A torture device in which a man would be made to sit on it, weight being added to his legs so that he would be forced to sink down until his–”

“I think I got it,” Will cut him off, cringing. “Jesus Christ…”

“Plenty of civilizations have dedicated contraptions to torturing that part of the body specifically,” Hannibal elaborated. “If I remember correctly, there are multiple of such devices in this room.”

“Are you trying to tell me something?” Will asked, opting to joke amongst his immense discomfort.

Hannibal grinned. “No. If I was, you would know…Though exploration is not something I frown upon–”

“Oh my God, stop talking,” Will interrupted with a laugh, throwing his hands up and stepping away. “Tell me about…” his eyes locked onto a large wheel. “That one.”

“Ah, the wheel,” Hannibal said, approaching and standing beside him once more. “It has many purposes, actually. Primarily used as a thing to tie the victim to, typically in a public setting. Humiliation was often its purpose.”

“Like the breaking wheel,” Will said as if vaguely remembering something.

“Yes, that is one of its uses. You’ve heard it before?”

“Sort of. I remember reading about it ages ago. Something about tying someone over the side to whip them in public.”

He met Hannibal’s eyes with an immediately disapproving look. “Don’t tell me you’re gonna joke about exploring that, too.”

Oh, Hannibal and his shit-eating grin. “You brought it up, dear Will.”

“God, I hate you sometimes.”

“I’ve never seen a breaking wheel in such stellar condition.”

The voice broke Hannibal from his thoughts and he looked up, spotting the man who entered the exhibit.

“Every artifact in here is as well-maintained as it can be,” Hannibal explained, extending a hand. “Roman Fell.”

“ *Doctor* Roman Fell,” the man corrected him. “I’ve heard so much about you. Antony Dimmond, and I assure you, the pleasure is all mine.”

Hannibal smiled through the awkwardness. This Antony fellow was certainly forward, but Hannibal was willing to give him the benefit of the doubt and assume that he was simply

trying to be overly polite. Social convention was a difficult thing to grasp for some.

For some, that's more charming than others.

"I'm curious to hear what you've heard, but I suppose it would be more polite to allow you to tour the exhibit first," Hannibal said.

"Not to worry, I've found the best exhibit here," Antony said, his gaze pouring over Hannibal's entire form. "Rumor has it no one's seen your husband in quite some time. Must be lonely."

Hannibal's jaw tightened, but he was quick to school his expression. "My husband has been ill. No need to infect others by bringing him to society parties, Mr. Dimmond."

"Oh, how tragic," Antony said with a tilt of his head. "The ill do tend to struggle to put out, don't they?"

"Excuse me?"

"How long's it been for you, hm?"

Just before Hannibal had the opportunity to properly tear the man to shreds, a far more familiar face entered the room.

"Dad!" Abigail called, ensuring that she laid the familial tie on thick once she spotted another person in the room, as her and Hannibal always did nowadays. "My classes got canceled for the day, professor's sick."

"Something must be going around," Antony said with a laugh, returning his gaze to Hannibal.

Abigail's brow furrowed, seeing the look of sharp dislike on Hannibal's face. She looked at Antony. "Sorry, I don't think we've met. You are…?"

"Just someone trying to get you a stepdad," Antony replied with a wink.

Hannibal's face grew rigid, his gaze on Antony completely cold.

Abigail blinked, laughing and shaking her head. "I guess not everyone was raised with manners. I'll see you at home, dad," she said, then promptly left.

She knew what would happen next, and was merely gracious enough to provide Hannibal the space to do it.

"Wow. Poor thing's a bit protective, huh?" Antony began, watching her leave before looking at Hannibal again. "Some groom you must have at home."

"Yes, one you cannot hope to replace. Though you would make the most exquisite gift to him."

Antony's eyebrows raised, an amused grin coming to his face. "Inviting me to that kind of party, are you?"

"No," Hannibal replied.

Antony's neck was snapped before he could respond. But oh, he was not dead.

Not yet.

———

Will sat on the couch, crunching on his salad as he stared at the TV screen. It was as good of a distraction as any, he supposed.

Abigail had come home early, but decided to catch up on the rest of her assignments in her room. Hannibal hadn't been home in a while, though, hence the salad.

The program that was on, which Will couldn't understand a word of, was suddenly interrupted by a flash that he assumed meant "Breaking News".

A reporter came on TV, looking professional, yet rather mortified by the news they were reporting. As they went on, images coming onto the screen, Will didn't need to understand Italian to know immediately what was being reported.

Someone had been murdered, and their body was in public.

As a detective (God, he looked like he'd seen Hell) was giving his commentary from a different section of the cathedral the body had been found in, a link to the news program's website appeared at the bottom of the screen, with some text beside it that was black on a yellow background, a clear warning label. Most likely for graphic content.

Will snatched Hannibal's tablet as fast as he could, thankful that it had no lock on it.

He tapped the website name into the search bar, and lo and behold, the case was on the home page, with a separate link to look further.

He clicked. And he scrolled. And he scrolled. And he–

Oh Jesus Christ.

There it was. The body didn't even look like a body anymore. It was completely skinned, every part of it twisted and molded until it was shaped like an anatomical human heart.

A Valentine.

The conclusion came to Will faster than he could process it, startling himself. He didn't know how he knew, he just…knew. He did work in law enforcement before, he–

…He taught criminal psychology. *That's* how he knew.

This was a love letter to someone from a killer. A broken heart, begging to be put back together.

Hannibal walked through the door to the sight of Will looking at his work on his tablet, and he suppressed a grin.

——

"What did you think of what you saw, Will?"

Will just shook his head, staring at the bookshelves that lined the office. "What I saw…was a gift for someone."

Hannibal forced himself not to visibly preen. "A gift? How did you come to that conclusion?"

Will shrugged. “I always could, I guess. You didn’t tell me I taught criminal psychology.”

Hannibal allowed himself to smile. “I knew it would come to you. That clever mind of yours is constantly at work, functional memories or not.”

“It was a gift,” Will repeated, dodging Hannibal’s supposed praise. “A killer left a gift for someone. Their broken heart, begging the person to mend it again.”

“And what of the swords?”

Will rubbed his face. “Um…The swords, yeah…Something like that tarot card I think? You hold it one way it means betrayal and hurt, you hold it the other way it means hope and love or something like that. I don’t remember exactly.”

“What way is this gift pointing?”

“Both ways,” Will said, looking at him again. “The heart is positioned the way the card faces in one direction, but the swords are in the position of if you hold the card the other way. This guy is…” Will took a deep breath, pressing his hands to his face again before lifting his head and continuing. “This guy is hurt, but he has hope. Whatever’s going on with whoever he made this for, they hurt him somehow. Or he feels like they did. But he’s hopeful, at least. He wants them to see both aspects of that.”

“And what do you suppose his end goal is?”

Will shrugged, tossing his hands up a bit. “No clue. I don’t know what killer would trust his apparent lover to see *that* and go running back into his arms, so I don’t know.”

Hannibal's initial slightly cheery demeanor at the conversation faltered. "You don't believe that person would accept the gift?"

"Who the fuck *would* ?" Will asked. "Unless they're a killer, too, or they don't mind him being one."

Will rubbed at his face again, leaning back in his seat. Hannibal watched in silence.

"I just…" Will began, his irritation still present though he was quieter now. "I used to investigate these things, didn't I? Or at least look at them in more depth. But this isn't…I'm not a criminal psychology professor anymore. I don't work with whatever department I was working with. We're in *Italy* . I can't just waltz to a crime scene and take a closer look. Who would let me? No one in their right mind would. So I just have to sit back and watch from afar."

"You do not like the limited gaze," Hannibal offered.

"No. I *hate* it," Will confirmed. "I know just bits and pieces of how I could think before. That's not…that's not there now. I don't know anything about this case. I just know–" He groaned, rubbing his palms over his eyes and looking at the ceiling. "I just know *Matthew* ."

"This reminds you of your own killing," Hannibal began. "You understand how someone may end up taking a life and their justifications for it. You've felt the same."

"What– No!" Will said, staring at him in disbelief. "Matthew wasn't…It wasn't like that! He was gonna kill her, I had to stop him, yes I'm glad he's dead but I'm glad because Abigail is *safe* .. This one is just…for all I know, he killed the nearest person just because he could. They were just a means to an end for him." His voice was slowly beginning to raise as he spoke, his agitation increasing.

"It does not strike you the way your own kills have?"

"All of them *disgust* me!" Will yelled. "All of it! What kind of person can *do* that? What kind of person am I for doing it, let alone what kind of monster is *this* guy?"

Hannibal sat completely still, stunned. He couldn't allow himself to look as appalled as he truly felt. He couldn't allow that heartbreak to come through.

He uncrossed his legs. "...We should end this session here. I had not intended to disturb you so much, Will."

Will sighed, raking a hand through his hair. "I'm sorry, I just–"

"You need not explain yourself to me, Will," Hannibal uncharacteristically interrupted, standing from his seat. "You feel how you feel. Please, allow me to end things here."

Before Will could respond, Hannibal left the room.

___

Hannibal sat on his bed, having the horrible sensation of a lump in his throat. It was not something he had to feel often, and yet he felt it more within the past few weeks than he ever had in his life, it would seem.

It was not so long ago that Will would have sculpted that heart alongside him. It was not so long ago that Hannibal could work on it alone, then show it off as a gift. Will would laugh, delighted by the gesture, and refer to it as a Valentine's Day present.

It was one thing back in the day, before Will had met his true potential, when Will was less than willing to indulge these things. But after already taking so many of those steps, and choosing to live this life with Hannibal, to be so far back to square one that he was *disgusted* by Hannibal's gesture?

The rejection burned through his very soul, like an acid that threatened to bubble up and burn him alive.

It was then, pathetically, that he finally admitted to himself why he had done it: It was supposed to bring Will back.

It was his final bit of hope, that mangled corpse, to make the transition easier. To make Will remember the way he had thought before, the way he had felt before. To make it so that, when these memories came flooding back, he didn't run the other way, away from Hannibal, away from their little family.

But he was going to, wasn't he? He was going to remember. His dreams were plagued by the deaths of the past, and they horrified him. How long would it be until he remembered the work done by Hannibal's own hands?

Or had he already, and hadn't spoken?

It was then, with that idea striking him, that he felt the tears finally leave his watery eyes. Tears for himself, for Abigail, and for his anxious, forgetful, mortified husband, who remembered neither of them.

———

Dinner passed by almost wordlessly. Will felt bad for Abigail more than anyone as she glanced between the two men, clearly knowing something was off but refusing to speak up.

Where did she go that night?

He looked away from her. His stomach lurched at the idea of throwing any suspicion onto her. It was bad enough that she'd had to deal with so much death before he ended up in her

life, now she had to deal with him as well. Two different killings of his. And yet, here she was, sat upright at the table as though nothing were wrong at all, besides her glances between the two.

Finally, right at the end, the other two began to speak.

Abigail and Hannibal kept their conversation in Italian, as brief as the conversation was. Will couldn't understand a word they were saying, until–

"Quindi hanno trovato il secondo corpo?"

Hannibal took a breath. "Yes."

Il secondo corpo…

It didn't take someone who necessarily knew the language to decipher it. *The second body* .

It couldn't be. She had to be talking about something else. Maybe after the anatomical heart sculpture had been found, there had been talks of another body dropping. Maybe she was referring to them finding it. He had no idea, he couldn't understand the news.

He wanted to think the best of her, he realized, but he wasn't sure he could, and that stung beyond anything else.

The three of them went off to their individual rooms soon after, Abigail sweetly bidding Will goodnight as she always tried to do. He gave a little wave in acknowledgement, shutting the door.

———

His hands burned. Why did they burn?

It was cold out. The wind blew through the leaves of the trees around him, rattling them and their little branches together to create a cacophony that felt directly contradictory to the current situation.

When the wind would stop, it was silent again.

She *was silent.*

The doe would never speak again.

There was nothing more he could do. It was done. His final goal in this miserable place before he could fully move on. No, he did not care that Hannibal told him not to do it. He did not care that it was too risky. He had to. She would've followed them around the world if she could, and Will would bet everything he had that she could.

The wind had blown her red curls over her face, and Will was grateful for it.

Shovel in hand, getting to work, Will heard familiar footsteps behind him.

"You're going to bury her?"

"Well what do you expect me to do, Hannibal? She's dead."

"Yes she is. You made sure of that."

“So are you gonna help or are you gonna bitch about it?”

“I was not scolding you, Will. I’m quite proud of your work here, in fact.”

"Proud– You're not proud . *I was sloppier than I've ever been..."*

“Then allow me to help you, at least, with the disposal."

“No.”

As soon as he’d said it, regret coursed through him. This was supposed to be something they did together .

His hand still hurt. Why did his hand hurt? What happened to his hand that night?

“Will. I’ve already taken care of Jack. At least let me–”

“You didn’t even want to kill her,” Will argued, continuing to dig.

He remembered, finally, the slice through his hand. It was bandaged (When did that happen?), but he was most definitely tearing it open again by trying to operate this shitty little shovel.

Why was he burying her? What did he do?

What did he do?

Hannibal's hand came over his wrist, not gripping tightly enough to hurt, but enough to stop him from continuing.

"I must insist," he said. "You're already hurt."

"Whose fault is that?" A petty comeback.

Silence. But Hannibal did not let go.

"You strangled her, Will," Hannibal said. "You've exacerbated your injury enough. Please, let me help."

"No."

"I've known you to be stubborn, Will, but never quite like this. Are you truly so upset that I warned you against killing her?"

Will turned to him finally, taking a deep breath.

"You'll just try to create something beautiful out of her," Will spat. "She doesn't deserve that."

———

He woke up in practically a pool of his own sweat, jolting awake and gasping for breath.

He wasn't entirely coherent yet, but he knew the ideas that were coming to his head. He knew them long after he calmed down, laying back down, staring at his ceiling as anxiety pooled in his gut.

He'd killed before. He'd killed *multiple people* before.

And Hannibal knew. Hannibal was *involved* somehow. His brain was trying to tell him that over and over and over again, but he hadn't been listening.

When Will killed Matthew Brown, Hannibal came to his side not to stop him, but to console him. To bathe the blood off of him.

And then, a realization that he should've acknowledged before, one that made him instantly feel nauseous: Abigail disposed of the body, didn't she?

Had she done that before? With her real father, had she? Is that why she was there, with them? Is that why they were all together?

He took a breath, trying to calm his racing thoughts. He had to do something. He had to figure out what was going on. He had to figure out who these people were.

And, if need be, he had to get out of there.

———

He sat at the table, barely touching his breakfast. His wife gave him worried looks across the kitchen, then finally came over, putting a hand on his shoulder and pressing a kiss to his temple.

“Eat, bellissimo,” she coaxed.

He smiled at her, placing his hand on top of hers on his shoulder. “I will, my love, I promise I will.”

She smiled back, pressing another kiss before walking away at last.

Rinaldo stared at the photos he had out on the table, sighing hard. The heart stared back at him, as though it was capable of beating. As though the monster wanted it to beat.

Oh, Persephone, Hades has found you. What will you do?

Chapter End Notes

forgive me for hopping on the "making Antony Dimmond creepy" bandwagon, I mostly needed a reason for Hannibal to kill him.

also, Rinaldo Pazzi's wife is underrated as hell. his entire reputation went down the drain and she stood by him

thank you for reading! :]

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Will does some digging, and what he finds terrifies him.

Chapter Notes

sorry if this chapter makes no sense LOL, maybe that's just me thinking that because i've been staring at it for too long

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He swallowed harshly around the sandwich he'd put together, looking across the table. Abigail was still munching happily on her own, hardly paying attention to him at all. Maybe it was her lack of focus that granted him the confidence to finally ask.

"Hey, Abigail?"

She looked up, brows raised. "Yeah?" she asked with her mouth still full.

"Before we came to Florence…did we go anywhere else?"

Abigail smiled, swallowing her bit of sandwich and nodding. "Yeah! We went to this small town first. It was beautiful there, I still have the scarf I got!"

Will nodded, figuring he could use her details for his lie. "Yeah, I feel like I vaguely remember it. Did Hannibal and I get anything there?"

Abigail giggled almost immediately, smiling wide. "That's where you two got–"

She froze.

She feigned confusion just long enough for it to almost look believable. Almost. “Shit…I thought I had it. It was right there. I can’t remember.”

Will nodded. Nodded around the new lump in his throat.

She was in on everything.

———

The two had left early, Hannibal to the exhibits, and Abigail to her university. Hannibal had made sure to leave a note behind, telling Will the plethora of things available for breakfast, along with the two’s schedules for the day. Hannibal wanted him to always know where they were.

Even so, Will checked around the place, more paranoid than ever.

Apollo trotted along behind him, tail wagging, head tilted. Poor guy had no idea what was going on at all. He could tell something was wrong, his owner more anxious than usual, but he was blissfully unaware of the danger they were in.

Only once Will could be completely sure that he was alone (or as sure as he could be, his paranoia unrelenting in its intensity) did he finally begin his true search.

He went into Hannibal’s room first, closing the door behind him. Apollo whined outside the door, but only briefly, laying on the floor to wait more patiently. Will couldn’t risk getting dog hair in the room and notifying anyone that he’d been in there. For all he knew, either one of them could show up at any second. He couldn’t risk *anything* .

When he first pulled a drawer open, he was hit with instant confusion. He pulled open the drawer beneath it, and the one beneath that, and beneath that.

The entire set of drawers on that side of the room were empty.

Little tufts of lint betrayed that there had indeed been clothes in some of the drawers before, and yet they were completely barren. Why had that bureau been cleared out?

Will moved onto the other side of the room, immediately noting that *that* set of drawers were completely full. At the first pull of the handle, a familiar scent from Hannibal's clean laundry washed over him, threatening to wither his resolve.

Don't falter. Not now. You can't.

He closed the drawer. His breathing was already harsher.

You can't focus on how gentle he's been with you. You know he's hiding everything from you. You know he's hiding dangerous things. Focus.

The closet was another beast entirely. Within it hung pristine suits in plastic wrapping, betraying Hannibal's need for cleanliness and neatness.

So why leave those little pills of lint in the barren drawers?

Will shook his head, continuing his search. There weren't any drawers in the closet, but there were containers near the bottom. Most had shoes, but one in particular had–

His breathing came to a halt.

He couldn’t process what he was seeing. It was as though familiarity hit him like a train, but the aftershock still left him unable to fully remember. He didn’t know why he knew that what he was seeing was the truth, he just *knew* .

And it was single-handedly the most terrifying thing he had seen since the incident that left him without his memory to begin with. No murders or murderous artworks could come close to the fear he felt, to the bile that threatened to spill onto the pristine, framed piece of paper in front of him. He knew what it was. He *knew* what it was. He hated that he knew what it was. He wished he was clueless. He wished he never went in there. He wished he lost his memory all over again so he could forget what he was seeing. He wanted nothing more than to sink back into the abyss of ignorance, let it wash over him, allow himself to be happily stupid.

It’s too late now. He knows what you are, and you know what he is. That’s why this thing exists. That’s why he kept it.

He’s been waiting for you.

He shoved the lid back onto the container, stumbling backward and practically slamming the closet door shut. He swung the door to the room open, startling poor Apollo, and took off toward the kitchen.

Even the spilling of his stomach contents into the stainless steel sink felt eerily familiar.

He prayed to a god that he didn’t know existed, just to offer his thanks that the other two weren’t home. He was trembling, sweat attaching his bangs to his forehead. Apollo whined beside him, anxious about his clearly unwell owner. Will couldn’t even bring himself to console the poor dog.

Everything made sense, and yet everything felt infinitely more confusing. Everything was an act. Everything was all an act. An intricate display of formality with casual displays of familialism interwoven through the textile of lies of omission. He knew who started it. He wondered if Abigail played along naturally, or if she’d been instructed to. He wondered if she’d been threatened. He wondered if *he’d* been threatened.

Enough had come flowing back, and yet it wasn't enough at all. A bitter taste of fragments of his past, slamming into him like shattered glass, tearing him open.

Hannibal would like that, wouldn't he? To have dripping parts of him to consume? That much came back to him. That much he knew.

Is that what had drawn them together, then?

Is that why he wasn't concerned that you fucking killed a man? He's seen it all before? Your dreams weren't fabricated?

Will wasn't allowed to know what things were like before Florence. Both the universe and Hannibal himself had deemed it so, though the universe lent enough of a helping hand to slip him memories to warn him far in advance.

Get out of there, you wretched thing , the universe whispered to him every night.

And he hadn't listened.

All of his dreams had been real. When did such horrible acts begin?

He didn't know, but amongst his dry-heaving into the sink, he knew who had started it. He knew enough about himself before the gap in time to know who had drawn him into that world.

He wondered if Hannibal had begun everything with promises of these gilded halls.

He clawed and clamored at the walls of his mind, begging to be given more context. Anything. Anything but what he'd been given.

The universe refused. The universe forced him to look at one undeniable fact, through the clear glass of a frame in that box that held a single sheet of paper, informing him of his reality.

———

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Will nodded. Nodded around the new lump in his throat.

She was in on everything.

She wasn’t safe for him either. He wanted to be sick.

No wonder she hid the fucking body for you. She’s just like him.

Just like you, apparently.

“Will? Are you okay?”

He just nodded again, sitting back in his seat. “Yeah, just…I dunno, my stomach started feeling weird. I’ll be fine.”

Abigail nodded back, though still looked mildly concerned. “Alright…Could you, uh, excuse me for a sec? I just wanna call Hannibal about something.”

His stomach dropped. “All for an upset stomach?”

“No,” she laughed. “No, not that. I forgot I wanted to ask him something about my next project. I’d meant to ask him earlier, but, yeah…excuse me for a bit.”

She got up from the table, heading off to her room.

Will brought a shaky hand to his mouth, trying to rub some sense back into his face. She was telling him. She was going to tell him. She knew what Will was asking about, and she was going to tell Hannibal.

Even in his nightmares, he couldn't remember fear like this. Even when Matthew Brown stood there in their supposed home, he didn't feel like this. A panic coursed through him unlike anything he'd felt in his life.

He had to leave. He had to get out of there, *now* .

But she would know. She would know and, God, she's a killer, too. He wouldn't make it to the doorway.

He wondered how she'd do it if she caught him.

He sat still, chewing on his sandwich even though it made him feel sick, needing to look occupied. Needing to look like he wasn't on the verge of bolting or throwing up a second time.

She was going to come out of her room soon, and she was going to notice if he looked afraid.

——

"Abigail," Hannibal answered casually, "what ever is going on that caused you to call me three times?"

"Why didn't you answer?" she hissed.

"Abigail," he said, his voice far more serious now, "what is happening at home?"

“Will’s remembering things,” she said, her voice beginning to shake. “I…I think he knows.”

“Knows what, Abigail?”

“He *knows* !”

His chest felt as though it caved inward, crushing his heart and lungs.

He remembered that day very clearly.

Abigail had been down in the little shops the town had to offer, while Hannibal had moved toward the church, Will in tow.

Will was smiling more that day than Hannibal could ever remember.

It wasn’t an official thing, it never could be. Not with their situation. But it was close, and the pastor was an old friend. Something unofficial wasn’t difficult to draw up, even if it could only be symbolic. It mattered to them. It always did.

The temperature rose in that hall of his memory palace, the edges of the paintings beginning to warp.

Will wouldn’t go sifting through his things.

…No. He would. He absolutely would, if he was paranoid enough.

“Return to your studies,” Hannibal said, his voice far calmer than his head, “and act as though nothing is amiss. I will be home shortly.”

“But– I have to do back to–”

“Abigail,” he coaxed, “ *please* . He cannot be led to believe that you’re hovering. He will know immediately that you’ve suspected something.”

Give him that much credit, you foolish girl.

Abigail took a deep breath, and he could imagine her nodding frantically.

“Okay,” she said, catching her breath. “Okay…I will.”

And she hung up.

Hannibal began to close things down, hoping to God that she would not be stupid enough to *tell* Will that he was coming home. Whatever panicked thoughts of fleeing Will must have, that would be sure to make him rush.

Hannibal had to put a stop to things before they could get out of hand. His dearly beloved deserved that much.

——

Will turned as Abigail left her room, bag over her shoulder. He managed the perfect look of nonchalance.

She came over, rubbing his shoulder a bit. “I’m heading out to my next class, Hannibal’s gonna be home soon.”

He did all he could to not allow himself to look as though that had sent a shock to his entire system.

“You said you weren’t gonna tell him about my stomach,” Will tried to joke.

Abigail smiled. “Sorry. I lied. Can you blame me for worrying about you?”

She gave a final pat, moving away and heading out the door.

He waited a minute, two minutes, until he knew she was out of the building, before racing from the table to his room, throwing clothes on as quickly as he could.

He bid his room a short mental goodbye as he exited it. He looked down at Apollo.

The poor thing…

Will gave Apollo one last hug, making sure his food and water dishes were full. Hannibal would be home soon anyway, but Will wouldn’t take the chance.

Just before he could move to the door, he glanced down at his left hand.

“Am I married?”

“You were.”

“Were…past tense.”

“I’m afraid he isn’t around.”

“What was he like?”

“He cared very much for you.”

“...I’m a widow.”

“Of sorts.”

Of sorts.

Will imagined, for a moment, how Hannibal must have felt when he’d woken up. How the pieces of his plan fell together like an elaborate puzzle. Will had asked too close of a question in their first interaction since the accident, and Hannibal had to cover his own ass.

The sentiment felt familiar, and it burned through him like touching a hot stove.

He pulled the ring off of his finger, slamming it down on the dining table, before rushing back into Hannibal’s room. He tore the closet open and wrenched the container from before out of it, carrying its single item back to the dining room to place alongside his ring.

A back alley marriage license, to Will and Hannibal Graham.

Hannibal was going to know exactly how he’d fucked up. It burned through every nerve Will had, every vein and artery. It was pain. It was *justice* .

And he rushed out the door.

———

The area was quiet after the girl left.

She seemed anxious, and she was in a hurry. What had she left behind? Did their plans change so soon?

He'd been outside of this building for quite some time, having put the pieces of his own puzzle together after catching nothing but a brief glimpse of the man.

His old suspect, that arrogant, pompous thing, had returned to Florence at last.

Hades was here.

Pazzi had previously wondered if it was possible for that girl to have been the Persephone he was looking for, but quickly thought against it. She was young, far too young, her immaturity evident in her overly cautious nature. *Il Mostro* would not aim for a thing like her.

That, and Dr. Roman Fell (or so he'd dubbed himself) was rumored to have a husband.

It made sense, the disguise. If *Il Mostro* had found a man like himself, Pazzi imagined he would've taken the opportunity. No one would question their closeness if they were said to be a married couple.

But *Il Mostro* does not love. It could not be anything more than a clever disguise.

Pazzi's head jerked up at sudden sound and sudden sight, his eyes narrowing as he looked at the doors of the building.

It hadn't been long since the girl departed, and down came a man, in a dress shirt and slacks like "Roman Fell" wore, looking more terrified than Pazzi had seen a man in years. The man looked around, as though he was waiting for something to pounce on him. Once he deemed it safe enough, he rubbed at his face, trying to get himself together, and quickly left down the nearest sidewalk.

Pazzi huffed, beginning to follow.

Hello, Persephone. Which legend is true?

Were you captured, or did you eat the pomegranate on your own?

Chapter End Notes

thank you for reading :]

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